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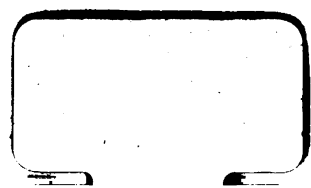
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He fired two shots in rapid
succession

(Page 312)

12

CONNECTICUT BOYS

IN THE

WESTERN RESERVE.

A TALE OF THE MORAVIAN MASSACRE

..BY...

James H. Braden.

AUTHOR OF
"FAR PAST THE FRONTIER," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

W. Herbert Dunton

AKRON, OHIO
THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING CO.

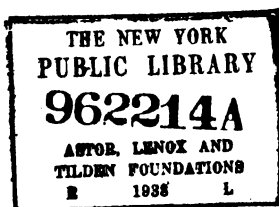
NEW YORK

1903

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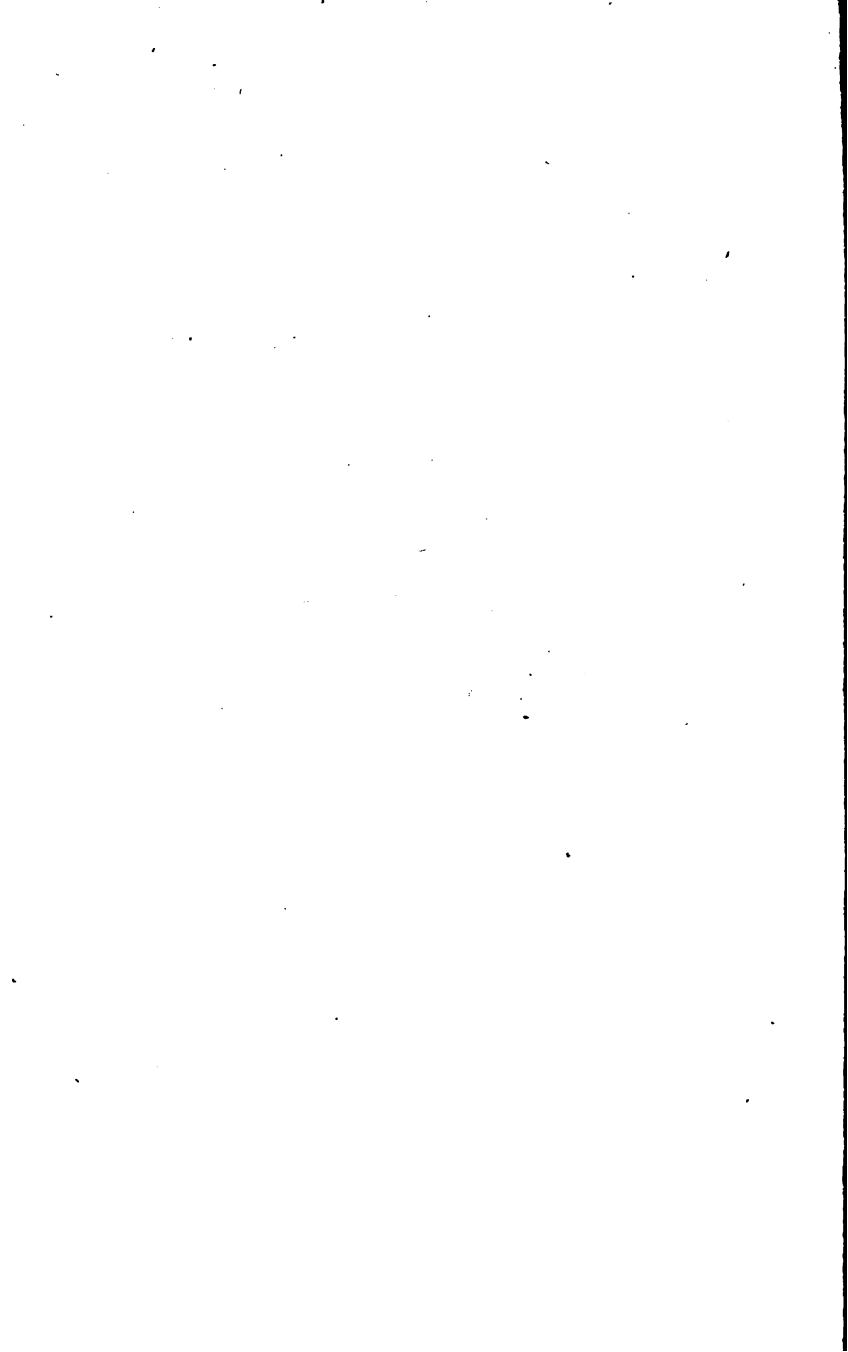
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Cadmus 22 June '93

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CHAPTER I.

A RAINY NIGHT.

A dismally wet and cold September day had come early to a close and thick darkness had settled down an hour since, when the horse attached to a heavy, canvas-covered, two-wheeled emigrant wagon stopped, at its driver's command, before an inhospitable looking house, from one window of which a feeble light was shining. The rain splashed drearily, the wind moaned in a ghostly way about the structure whose dim outlines were just visible, and flapped the canvas over the wagon fitfully.

The barking of a gruff-voiced dog from somewhere near the house gave certain sign that the arrival of the cart had been noticed by that

animal, as a tall, broad shouldered boy sprang lightly down from the vehicle and walked briskly toward the door of the gloomy building.

"Now, never mind, Ring," spoke a young, but full and pleasant voice, from the front of the wagon, as a large dog that stood beneath growled deep in its throat in answer to the barking of the other canine. Instantly the dog was quieted and at the same moment came the sound of knocking at the door of the partially lighted house. A full minute passed, and the knocking was vigorously repeated before there was a response.

"This ain't a tavern any more; we can't keep ye," said a man who put his head out, before the caller could speak.

"This is the Eagle tavern, isn't it?" the boy inquired calmly, and the light through the half-open door showed him to be a muscular youth of probably eighteen years, though the serious look about his eyes and mouth, and his dark hair gave him a somewhat older appearance.

"It used to be the Eagle tavern, but it ain't

now. Is that all?" the man in the doorway replied gruffly.

"Why, no, it is not all," the lad returned. "There are two of us with a horse and wagon and we want to stay all night. The storm is growing worse, and though we had intended to camp by the roadside, we pushed on through the mud and darkness to reach this place. We expect to pay for our lodging."

"It don't make no difference, I tell ye! We ain't keeping a public house."

"Come, come, Mr. Tavern-keeper, my friend and I have both been here before, and if we are willing to stay, you should surely be willing to keep us."

"That's the talk!" called the one who remained in the wagon, "and let's have a lantern out here, and lose no further time about it!"

The man in the door moved aside to let the light fall more directly on his caller's face.

"Yes, I rec'lect ye," he said slowly. And then, his face brightening suddenly, he added more pleasantly, "Wait a jiffy."

He closed the door and a murmur of voices sounded for a short time from within. Presently, however, the man reappeared with a tall candle set in a round tin box full of small holes, which he carried by a ring in its top, as a lantern, and followed the young men who had summoned him, to the cart drawn up by the roadside.

"The Eagle tavern's been closed all summer and we hadn't ought to keep ye," the man explained, standing by while the two boys unhitched their horse and led the animal into the log barn across the road from the house. "Ye kin pull yer cart under this shed out o' the rain," he went on, indicating a lean-to beside the barn.

In a few minutes the horse had been fed and the host led the way into the house, entering a long, low room, where, in a fireplace, a smoky, cheerless blaze was flickering. On a table set against the wall opposite the fireplace, a candle was burning, and toward the farther end of the dingy apartment two men were

seated, their chairs tilted back in careless attitudes.

"There ain't much here to eat," the landlord said, as he motioned his guests to a settle in the chimney corner. "My wife died an' I quit keepin' a tavern. I'll git ye what I kin."

The two boys he thus ushered in did not sit down, but stood before the blaze to allow their clothes to dry; the one who had remained in the wagon while the other went to the door, turning about after a minute or two and stirring the fire till it burned more brightly. He was seventeen years old or thereabout, more slender than his companion and not so tall. His brown hair grew long, and about his blue eyes there was a twinkle of merriment, as he said: "Wood is cheap; we may as well have enough fire to do some good."

"Right you are, young man," spoke one of the two strangers still sitting in the semi-darkness. "It's a nasty night."

"Right you are," said the lad, still stirring the fire, adopting the stranger's own words.

One of the two men arose and stepping up to the blaze seated himself on the settle. He was a villainous looking fellow, his curly black hair cut short, his nose very large, red and sharp pointed, his chin unnaturally prominent, his eyes small, black, and deep-set, marks of smallpox adding further to make his face an unpleasant one. His age was not less than forty-five years.

So disagreeable, indeed, did the two boys find this man's appearance that instinctively both looked more closely to see what his companion was like. They beheld a man ten years younger than the other, though his hair was turning gray, and his hardened leather-like skin made him seem older than he was. He had fairly honest eyes, however, though he turned them away and looked steadily in another direction when he found that he was observed.

"I was just tellin' my friends here about Ichabod Nesbit bein' killed, when you chaps come along," said the landlord a few minutes later, as he came bringing in some cold meat

and a loaf of bread, which he placed on the table. Then asking his young guests to sit down and help themselves, which they proceeded to do, he went on:

“I rec’lect that you boys was sort o’ interested in Nesbit, an’ I heard that it was you two that brought the news East of how he was killed.”

“Yes,” said the older of the two lads in a disinterested way, while the other gave him a quiet pinch under the table.

“Killed by an Indian, you said, didn’t you?” put in the villainous looking man.

“An Injun named Black Eagle,” said the landlord.

Neither boy made any move to join in the conversation and the tavern-keeper took another tack.

“Most forgot how to be polite,” he said. “I don’t rec’lect your names, young men, but make you acquainted with Mr. Samuel Duff and Mr. Lon Dexter, travelers same as you be. My name’s Quilling, ye know that.”

It was to the name Samuel Duff that the villainous looking man answered. His better appearing companion arose as the name Lon Dexter was pronounced.

"My name is Kingdom," said the older of the two boys, rising to shake hands as the men came forward.

"And mine is Jerome," said the more slender lad, with none too much friendship in his tones.

"Going West, I take it," said Duff, trying to speak pleasantly.

"Yes," said the young man named Kingdom, as both boys reseated themselves and went on with their supper.

"So are we," he of the evil appearance continued—"Dexter and I."

"It is a great country—the Ohio country, I mean," said Kingdom, his keen, dark eyes scrutinizing the fellow who had seemed to suggest that they might travel together, while he mentally decided that he would like no such arrangement.

“Yes, a great country and a big country. We’re just going to look around and see whether there would be a good chance to get hold of first-rate land to settle on when the Indian troubles are over,” Duff answered.

No immediate reply being made to his words, the fellow went on in a careless tone which any one could have seen was assumed:

“But you won’t catch us staying around long where the Redskins have war paint on. That man Ichabod Nesbit, we were speaking of, would probably have been living yet if he hadn’t gone off to that blasted wilderness. What part of the country was he killed in, anyhow?”

“Beyond Pittsburg. Why?” quickly put in the lad Jerome, his interest aroused. For the thought came to him that Ichabod Nesbit was just such an outlaw as the fellow now inquiring about him looked to be.

“Ho! nothing in particular! You seem to be mighty suspicious, the way you ask

'Why,' " Duff exclaimed, with anger he tried not to show.

"No harm ain't be'n done, I don't see. Jest hear it rain though!" put in the other of the two men, Dexter, speaking for almost the first time. His voice was a hoarse whisper, and gave the impression that he was frightened and afraid to speak louder.

"Why," said Kingdom, "there is no secret about when and how and where the man Nesbit was killed. He had followed us all the way from this very tavern, clear across the mountains and the Ohio river. On the way West, he fired at us one night, as we were in camp, and happened to kill Northwind, the son of the Indian, Black Eagle. The long and short of it all is, that Black Eagle, after burying his son, found the trail of Nesbit and followed it—tracked him through woods and over mountains, though how he could do it is wonderful, and at last came up with him only a few minutes after Nesbit had fired on our camp a second time, killing our horse. They fought, and

Nesbit was killed, but just how or where we do not know. We did not see the fight or know anything about it until Black Eagle told it himself, months afterward, and showed the man's skull as certain evidence that he was dead."

For a little time nothing more was said. The wind howled dolefully outside and the rain beating on the roof and windows added to the feeling of melancholy which seemed to pervade the whole place. Little wonder is it that the thoughts of the two boys went back to the terrible experiences they had had in a former trip from their home in Connecticut to the wilderness beyond the western frontier of Pennsylvania. They remembered how a robber and cut-throat by occupation, Ichabod Nesbit, had attempted to relieve them of their money at this very inn—the Eagle tavern—how they had shot at him and he had then secretly followed them, mile after mile, week after week, firing at them from a distance on two occasions and at last killing their horse when they were but a few miles from the spot

where, beside the Cuyahoga river, they located and built a cabin.

They remembered, too, that Nesbit had been in search of a cousin, named Arthur Bridges, whom he would have killed had he found him, in order to palm himself off as Bridges, whom he closely resembled, and secure his property. And Nesbit was responsible from the beginning for Arthur Bridges' never having returned home after the Revolutionary war, in which he was a soldier. They had met on the road and, Nesbit told Bridges that his (Bridges') mother had died and his father was cursing him and hoping never to see him again because he had joined General Washington's army. And it was only by chance that Bridges had discovered through Tom Fish, a friend who had gone in search of him, that Nesbit had deceived him most cruelly.

"The Indian—did you say his name was Black Eagle?—is quite civilized, I understand," said Duff, at last. "His home is in the East."

"More civilized than some white folks," spoke up young Jerome, remembering that the Redskin had been kind to him and Kingdom.

Duff growled an inaudible reply, in response to this thrust, and Kingdom, being tired and, moreover, wishing to avoid any trouble with this disagreeable fellow, suggested that it was time to go to bed.

The landlord, upon request of the boys, brought a candle and showed them into a small down-stairs room opening into a narrow passage-way which led to the general living room where they had passed the evening.

"I wish we had not stopped at this wretched hole," said Jerome when the boys were alone.

"Oh, I don't know about that. It is pleasanter to be here, disagreeable as it is, than to be camped along the road," Kingdom answered. "We could have slept in the wagon, but the horse couldn't, and it is such a bad night! Make the best of it, old chap."

For an hour the young friends lay awake talking of their journey and especially of the

unusual interest the two strangers had shown in the death of Ichabod Nesbit, and their desire to know just where he was killed.

"I must have a drink of water," said the lad who has been called Jerome, as Kingdom turned over to go to sleep; and slipping into his trousers he felt his way along the passage, remembering there was a bucket of water on a bench in a corner of the living room.

He opened the door and passed into the latter apartment, surprised to find the light still burning. The landlord and the two men, Duff and Dexter, were sitting beside the little table in the gloomy place, their heads bent close to the candle, while they intently examined a frayed and time-worn piece of paper. It looked like the half of a long sheet of letter paper torn in two lengthwise.

"It ain't no use, it ain't. I've studied it right side up an' wrong side up an' side ways an' length ways, an' it ain't no use!" Quilling, the landlord, was saying in an undertone when Jerome's footfall attracted the attention

of the men, and all three sprang quickly to their feet.

“Blast you, you blasted spy!” cried Duff, springing toward the boy.

“Don’t repeat that, mister, if you please,” was the lad’s cool answer. “I was not spying on you, and don’t intend to let any one call me such names.”

“He was only jokin’—Mr. Duff was only jokin’,” hoarsely whispered Dexter, trying to appear to laugh.

CHAPTER II.

TALL TODD'S WARNING.

Having gotten a drink of water, as he had set out to do, Jerome quietly returned to his room. He told Kingdom what had happened and they wisely determined to sleep with one eye open. This they did, their trained senses ready to detect the first unusual sound, but nothing occurred to disturb them, and even Ring, their faithful dog, sleeping beside the bed, showed no sign of uneasiness.

"Mr. Duff and Mr. Dexter ain't up yet," the landlord explained, as he set out a scanty breakfast for the boys, when morning came. But the young friends made no comment, and

though the man stood around hoping to hear some expression from them as to what they thought of the worthy pair of whom he spoke, his curiosity was unsatisfied.

An almost perfect autumn day followed the stormy night. The sky was flecked with clouds, but between them the sun shone bright and cheery and a soft, warm wind aided in drying the muddy roads. The young emigrants, safely on their way once more, were in the best of spirits. They talked at length of the strange actions of the men at the Eagle tavern, and although they could reach no satisfactory conclusion as to the meaning of the piece of frayed paper the fellows had had, they attached not a great deal of importance to it—far, very far, less than it deserved, as they were destined in time to learn.

A long journey lay before these two boys, whom readers of "Far Past the Frontier" will have recognized as Return Kingdom and John Jerome, on their way once more to the wilderness beyond Fort Pitt or Pittsburg. Six

months earlier they had left their little cabin in the forests to return to their home in Connecticut. In company with them was Big Pete Ellis, whom they had rescued from the Indians, he and Return having escaped together from a band of Mingoes, who, headed by a Delaware Indian, Big Buffalo, had attacked the boys' cabin and after a desperate fight captured Kingdom. Also with the lads when they went back to Connecticut, it will be remembered, was Tom Fish, the woodsman whose friendship they had formed on their first trip West, and Arthur Bridges, Tom's friend, who was a cousin of Nesbit, the outlaw. Bridges had suddenly appeared one evening at the cabin, and as it had been believed that he was dead, there was great rejoicing. Gladly he had gone with Tom Fish and Kingdom and Jerome to Connecticut where for years his mother had been living upon the hope that he would sometime return.

It was in May that the boys and their friends had gone from the savage country where they

had built their cabin; and now having worked as harvest hands during the summer, they were headed once more for the land of the Delawares, their cart packed with a well selected stock of supplies for their own use and a variety of articles for trade with the Indians.

On their previous venture, when they had first set out to make homes for themselves in the new country, the two friends had done well as traders; and though this time they meant to give more attention to clearing land for farms, they knew that the Indians would receive them more kindly if they came with merchandise to exchange for furs, while they would be quite unwelcome if they came only as settlers. Such at least, had been their former experience and, notwithstanding the trouble they had had with the Mingoes and Big Buffalo, they hoped to have no further difficulty, as Hopocon, or Captain Pipe, as the white men called him, the chief of the Delawares, had promised his protection when they had paid him for the land on which they built their cabin.

Indeed, they were certain that Big Buffalo would not have dared lead the Mingoes against their cabin, had it not been that Captain Pipe and most of his warriors had gone to the far northwest for fighting which was expected to take place there.

From Connecticut to Ohio in these days is not a very long journey. It was different in the year 1791 when Return Kingdom and John Jerome were making the trip over rough roads, through the forests and an almost unbroken wilderness, constantly growing wilder, as they progressed, and the way more dangerous, especially after passing Pittsburg. Steadily, however, they continued on. The weather was for the most part pleasant, and though the evenings were cool, blazing camp fires gave all the warmth desired.

Only one night after leaving the Eagle tavern did the boys spend under roof, for there were few inns along the way and as the borders of civilization were left farther and farther behind, none whatever. No adventure of impor-

tance befell them, however, until they reached Pittsburg, then a rough frontier hamlet built up about the fort from which it took its name. They had learned the road on their previous journey, and though a number of mishaps had occurred, including a hard fall John had had from a great rock he climbed in hope of getting a shot at a bear which had trotted across the rough trail some distance ahead of them, none of these were serious.

And thus, in the late afternoon of a hazy October day the young men drove slowly into the frontier settlement which would be the last sign of civilization they expected to see for a long time to come.

It might be years before they would return to Connecticut again. Return Kingdom, being an orphan, who had known no home except as the bound boy of Henry Catesby, had few near friends there. Mrs. Catesby and her daughter, Mary, had been very kind to him after Mr. Catesby's death, but they were now living in town that Mary might attend school. Captain

William Bowen, an old friend, was the only other person, unless it was Pete Ellis, who cared much about him, he thought. Why should he wish to return? There was only one other tie to bind him to Bruceville, his boyhood home. His mother's grave was in the little churchyard there. She had been dead a long time, but he loved her memory. His father, killed in the Revolutionary war, he had never known.

As for John Jerome, he was one of a large family. His father was poor. Their little farm would scarcely support them all and work was scarce. That he would be missed John knew, but he also knew that his chances of getting along—of making something of himself—were better in the newer country. He would go home some day to visit, surely, but he had set out to make his own way, and it might be years before the opportunity again to see those he loved, would come.

Maybe both boys were thinking of the friends left behind, as very soberly they drove

into Pittsburg. Their heavy, covered wagon drawn by one strong horse attracted no little attention as they passed down the main street of the rough, stockaded town of brick and log buildings, and with the easy familiarity of the early times many called out to them in a friendly, hospitable way to ask whence they came and whither they were going. There were words of astonishment, and grave shaking of heads when the travelers answered that they were bound for the unbroken West. Said one man in a worn-out soldier's uniform:

“You'll be safe enough if you go down the river with some big party, but you'll be scalped, sure, if you go toward Sandusky Plains, as you say. Why, there's terrible times! General St. Clair left Fort Washington not six weeks ago to march into that country and there'll be murderin' an' scalpin' to beat all get out! St. Clair was here in the spring, an' all summer long he has been recruitin' at Fort Washington for the biggest kind of fightin'; an' it's bound to come just as soon as he gets into the

Redskins' country. He's got two boys o' mine with him—young fellers 'bout same age as you, but I ain't worried half like I would be if they was goin' off by themselves, not a hundred miles west o' here!"

As the boys drove up to the public house where they had stopped on their former trip to the West, they were recognized by a number of men seated on a split log bench just outside, smoking their pipes.

"Thunder an' lightnin'! Where ye goin'?" exclaimed one of the loafers, a great, lanky fellow known as Tall Todd, as Kingdom and Jerome, rather enjoying the excitement their appearance caused, stepped up to shake hands with their acquaintances.

"Goin' back to yer cabin beyond old Fort Laurens? By jinks, ye ain't! It's sartin death to both of ye. Wasn't ye both purty near murdered an' one of ye purty near burned to the stake? D'ye s'pose them Mingoos will hev forgot that ye killed three or four of the war party at yer cabin? D'ye s'pose that Big Buf-

falo devil will hev forgot his grudge ag'in ye? By jinks! a Redskin don't never fergit these things! Fellers, we had all orte be hung fer murder if we let these young shavers throw their lives away, this here way!"

The vehemence with which Todd spoke, refusing to be interrupted, though both Kingdom and Jerome tried to break in on his exclamations, caused the boys some uneasiness; not so much for fear of their safety beyond the border, as for the possibility that their friends would be unpleasantly insistent that they must abandon their trip. They realized that their undertaking was hazardous, but they relied on their ability to make peace with the Indians as they had done before, and they were certain that if Captain Pipe, the Delaware chieftain, were in his village, a few miles from which their cabin stood, Big Buffalo would not dare attack them again. When their horse had been led away to the stable, and all were seated before the door of the house which did duty as

tavern, the young men explained these things to Tall Todd and the others.

“What was Tom Fish an’ Bridges doin’ that they let ye come ’way off here by yerselves?” suddenly asked Todd, who had been shutting his eyes and mouth tight, and shaking his head most emphatically, in answer to everything the boys had said.

“Oh, they said to wait until winter and they would come with us. But we did not agree to that, and as they lived so far away, we did not see them again. It was in July that we saw them last. When we got ready, we started. If they had come it would have been only for a little hunting, and we were afraid they would think they were obliged to go with us, if we sent them word.”

“It was only last week that a white man was found dead and scalped just beyond old Fort McIntosh,” said an elderly man, quietly. “About a month ago a chap named Keaton was tomahawked and his scalp taken, not a day’s march from this very spot. Both were killed

in a mysterious way, too—one shot from ambush, the other attacked while he was cooking himself a meal; and he never knew what hit him, from all appearances, they say. It looks mighty bad. I've been through the woods a good many times, and I don't get scared at my shadow, but honest to goodness I mean it, when I say that I wouldn't care to go a great ways into the Ohio country alone, now."

"By jinks, it is queer how them two fellers was killed, ain't it?" put in Tall Todd. "An' it jest reminds me o' ol' man Crane that was killed the same way four days after he left here for the Moravian settlement. Nobody knew how, nor nothin'. Ye remember some fellers comin' up river picked up his carcass. Not a thing he had was touched. Only his bullets an' powder was gone—an' his hair. His gun an' knife—everything else was layin' jest as he fell!"

"Well, who did it?" demanded John Jerome, quite abruptly.

"That's jest it! Who did it?" Todd answered.

"There's a story told," said the quiet, elderly man, "that a Redskin who got away at the time of the massacre of the Christian Indians at the Moravian settlement, ten years ago, come next March, has lately come back to these parts and kills every white man he sees, on sight. A couple of hunters and traders coming in here from Kentucky told the tale. We don't know how true it is."

"There ain't nothin' of it, I'll bet a gun," said Todd. "I've heard the yarn, an' it don't stand to reason. 'Cause as you jest said, Eli, the Moravians was killed ten years ago, come March, an' that score was all settled when Crawford was burned. An' right there, youngsters, is somethin' to put in yer night-caps, when yer countin' on the friendship of that ornery Delaware, Captain Pipe, by jinks! He was one of the critters that burnt Colonel Crawford!"

"Yes, we knew that before we ever met him,"

said Kingdom cheerfully, lest his friend Jerome should be depressed by these alarming reports.

"I only started out to say that the killin' of the Moravians was so long ago, that it ain't likely any Injun has just now started out to hunt scalps and satisfaction on account of it," Todd replied, somewhat taken back by the young traveler's cheery reply to his doleful warning against Captain Pipe.

The sun had gone down as the men and boys were talking and now the guests at the place were called to supper. Only one of those who were sitting outside arose and went in with the boys. The others, being there only as loungers, remained where they were or went to supper elsewhere.

The man who accompanied Kingdom and Jerome to the table had little to say, but ate of the roast venison and corn bread which was placed before them, silently. He was a genteel appearing person, of about sixty years, wearing a wig and a riding suit of fine texture. His

smoothly shaven face bore marks of refinement though there was a certain look of dissipation about him. He had not spoken outside and the two boys had not learned his name or business, though they knew from his sombre dress that he was a Quaker. It was apparent that he had been traveling on horseback but it might be that he belonged about the fort or town, and the lads gave him little attention.

"I tell you, Ree, the stories of those chaps being killed so mysteriously bothers me more than anything else," said John Jerome to his friend.

Kingdom only smiled in reply, though in his heart he was worried more than he would have admitted.

"Honestly, I would think that Ichabod Nesbit was still alive, shooting at people from behind, and all that, if I didn't know positively that Black Eagle killed him," John went on.

The stranger at the opposite side of the table gave a sudden start,—a start as if an unseen hand had struck him on the back, as the name

of Nesbit was mentioned. He cast a quick, intent look toward the two young friends, and perceiving that his agitation had been noticed, put his hand before his mouth and coughed violently, plainly trying to make believe that some obstruction of his throat caused his sudden disturbance.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERY OF THE FOREST.

Much as Kingdom and Jerome wondered what interest this well dressed stranger had in Ichabod Nesbit, they were too polite to ask any questions, unless they were first spoken to; but their thoughts turned naturally to the frayed and old piece of writing which John had seen in the possession of the men at the Eagle tavern. They recalled how interested those men had been in learning just where Ichabod Nesbit was killed, and that Duff and Dexter had said they were on their way West.

Yet, much as they tried, neither of the boys

could suggest a reason for the interest in the death of the dead robber which seemed to have so suddenly risen. They discussed the subject at much length, sitting alone in the moonlight that evening, on the heavy shafts of their wagon, beside the barn, when they had seen to it that their horse was fed and their dog had a comfortable place for the night on a blanket beneath the cart, insuring the perfect safety of the vehicle and its contents.

The lads had not seen Tall Todd after supper, but as they were going into the house to go to bed, he met them near the door and urged them most seriously to give up their plan to go on into the wilderness alone.

Todd was a good natured, kindly man and undoubtedly meant well by his friends, but by habit he spoke in an extravagant manner, and the young men believed that many of the alarming statements he made were exaggerated—either by himself, quite unintentionally, owing to his manner of speaking; or by those from whom he had heard them. They thought

most seriously, however, of the report given by the quiet, elderly man, Eli Hopp, concerning the mysterious murders which had taken place along the extreme frontier, and prudence bade them investigate before venturing into the almost trackless forest alone. They probably would have remained in Pittsburg several days or more for this purpose, but for a remark made by the proprietor of the public house at which they remained over night, next morning.

“Tall Todd says you chaps have decided to stay here awhile and maybe wait for some party goin’ down river, to go along with.”

The words fired Kingdom’s pride. He was usually a cool, thoughtful lad; and though he showed no resentment or injured self-esteem in his tones, now, he answered instantly:

“No, he must be mistaken. We not only did not say that, but we are leaving to-day to go on to the cabin we built on the Cuyahoga river.”

“We have corn and other crops to harvest, if there is anything left of them. We had quite

a farm, you know, when we left there last spring," put in John Jerome jocularly.

The landlord's face grew serious and he began telling of the Indian disturbances all along the border; but Kingdom adroitly turned the conversation in such a way that he was able without seeming over-curious, to inquire about the well dressed stranger who had sat at table with them the night before and had been so disturbed by mention of the name of Ichabod Nesbit.

"By vum, partner, you've stumped me," the man replied. "That fellow came along here on horseback day before yesterday, engaged his keep, carried his saddle bags to a little room I let him have, as though they was both full of gold—he watched them that close—and this morning he paid his reckoning, got on his horse and away he went, saddle bags and all. Tall Todd couldn't get anything out of him, so I knew 'twan't any use my tryin', though he did tell me what he didn't tell Todd, and that was, that his name was Theodore Hatch and that he

was a surveyor. But bless you! I don't believe that. I think he's a British spy, that's what I think!"

"Pretty dangerous for him to be around here, if he is," said young Jerome, bristling up as though he would personally assault the gentleman the next time they met.

"The woods are full of British from Detroit," the landlord went on. "Talk about the war being over, what are the pestiferous Redcoats always setting the Indians against our settlers so, for? We will have to set about licking them out of their boots again, the way they are behaving! But what most of all makes me think this Mr. Theodore Hatch is a Britisher is that he rode off down the river right toward bad Injun country alone. He wouldn't dare do it, if he wasn't a Britisher and friendly with the Redskins. And what did he have in them saddle bags, do you suppose? He had gold for the Mingoes and the Delawares and the Wyandots and every red moth-

er's son of the savages, he had. Now that's what I think!"

The two boys did not mention the stranger's agitation of the night before, but they could not understand how a British spy could have any interest in Ichabod Nesbit, and as they talked the subject over by themselves, they concluded that on that point the landlord was probably mistaken.

It was true, nevertheless, that then and for many years afterward there were agents of the British government going among the Indians, rousing them to deeds of violence against the American settlers. British soldiers helped in the defeat of General St. Clair by the Indians that very fall of 1791,—only a month later than that day when Kingdom and Jerome, some time after their talk with the landlord, said goodbye to him and to Tall Todd and others they knew, and set forth again upon their journey on into the western wilds.

Todd was still loud in his declarations that it was nothing less than murder to permit the

boys to continue into the wilderness, but their determination overbalanced all his objections and, though cautioning them repeatedly, other men really admired their pluck, as they watched the two friends drive slowly away.

“We will reach the Cuyahoga river within two weeks if we have good luck, Ree,” said John. “That will give us all the time we need to get our corn harvested, if there is any of it left, and to get our little house all in good shape for winter before cold weather comes.”

“I think we will be able to gather some nuts, there are plenty of hickory-nuts and butternuts, too, along the river and back among the hills.”

So with the most hopeful conversation the boys passed the time. Had they fully realized the dangers which would surround them they could not have been so care-free. They knew that they must keep their wits about them and their eyes open wide, and this they did; but they were far from expecting the adventures which were in store for them.

The roads east of Pittsburg had been scarcely worthy of the name, but west of that frontier settlement there were practically none. Neb—short for Nebuchadnezzar—the big black horse the lads drove, had all he could do in many instances to pull the well loaded cart up the little hills which were encountered, and through the swampy places which must now and then be crossed. The trail followed was the same as that taken by the boys upon their previous journey West, the preceding fall, and the work done at that time in opening a roadway where it was impossible otherwise for the cart to pass, stood them in good stead now. But at best their progress was slow, and Colonel Boquet, whose famous Indian expedition many years earlier, traveled in part the same course as that these two sons of Connecticut were now taking, moved as fast as they did, though he made but from seven to ten miles a day.

For several miles, soon after leaving Pittsburg, the trail the boys followed kept them

close to the Ohio river. There they discovered the tracks of a horse which had preceded them. Rightly they guessed that the hoof prints were those of the steed of the mysterious stranger who had called himself Theodore Hatch.

"I wish we could overtake him," said John, speaking of the tracks they saw.

"It is strange that he should be going into this country alone and with practically no baggage," said Kingdom. "I can't make out what he's up to, unless it be true that he is a British agent. Of course it might be that he is a missionary going to the Moravian villages, but he did not look much like one."

"I should say not. He looked like a soldier, I thought—an army officer dressed up as a Quaker."

The prospect that the boys might fall in with the mysterious stranger seemed to increase daily. Though he undoubtedly traveled faster than they, it was apparent that he was pursuing the same general course as themselves and much the same trail. They saw places where

he had encamped for the night, and often during the day the tracks of his horse. Still there was nothing to indicate the man's identity.

It was late in the afternoon of the sixth day after leaving Pittsburg. The young travelers had found level land and comparatively easy traveling that day, and having gone a long distance, were casting about for a camping place.

"I'll forge ahead and see if there is running water in the little valley yonder," said John. "If there is, we need go no further."

Hastening forward, he came to the edge of the hill sloping down to the shallow gully of which he had spoken. He heard the trickle and splash of a stream of water, and in another moment would have turned to go back, but his quick eye caught the outlines of a horse's flank among some low bushes near the brook, and he paused.

Carefully he watched but the animal did not stir. Ree was not more than a hundred yards away, and hurrying to him, John told of the discovery.

"It must be our Britisher," said Kingdom, thoughtfully, "so few of the Indians have horses. But we will soon find out. Come on."

Leaving their cart where it was, for Neb could be trusted not to run away, the boys walked with as great a show of unconcern as possible down into the valley. They took pains to speak to each other in tones moderately loud, as though they were looking only for a place to camp, hoping to attract the stranger's attention. But their approach seemed entirely unnoticed. They could see only the flanks and back of the horse which was standing among the low bushes, and were somewhat surprised to notice that the animal was saddled. So perfectly still did the creature stand, too, they were puzzled more and more.

Suddenly the horse raised its head, looked backward with great, sorrowful eyes for a moment, then with a low, pitiful whinny turned and trotted toward the boys.

"Something's wrong here," said Kingdom, beneath his breath. "My goodness, I hope—"

The sentence was cut short by John speaking to the dapple gray that had now come close up to them, plainly doing its best to talk.

“Show us what it is—what’s the matter, old fellow?” said Jerome, patting the horse’s forehead.

Kingdom did not wait for an answer to his companion’s question, but stepped quickly forward among the underbrush. He pushed his way through to a small, clear space beside the stream, and as he reached it a little cry of surprise and dismay escaped him. Then swift as a deer he leaped to the center of the open space, and in another instant was kneeling beside the body of—Theodore Hatch, the Quaker.

The man lay face upward upon the leafy ground, the pallor of death upon his cheeks, the scalp cut from his head. Beside his body the ground was ploughed deep by the hoofs of the horse, showing clearly how the faithful beast had watched and waited for a word from the master who could not speak. A few feet distant were the dead ashes of a tiny fire, and a

small coffee dipper burned black still setting among them, its contents long since evaporated.

“Oh, Ree!”

John Jerome could say no more as, followed by their faithful dog and the stranger's horse, he hastened through the brush to his friend's side and at a glance saw what was there.

“He's alive—sure as the world, the body is still almost warm!” cried Ree in an undertone, and seizing the blackened dipper, filled it at the brook and bathed the stranger's death-like face.

“See if there is brandy or anything in his saddle bags, John,” he next commanded. “Oh, if we can save him!”

Instead of taking the chance of finding nothing to the purpose among the stranger's baggage, John dashed away across the valley and up the hill to their cart. He knew there were restoratives in a small medicine chest they carried beneath the seat of that vehicle, and in a minute or two he had selected what he wanted and returned. He found that Ree had

loosened the stranger's collar and placed his own coat beneath his head.

"Where is the wound, Ree?" he asked in a whisper.

"I haven't looked," Kingdom answered, drawing open the stranger's mouth and putting between his lips a tiny quantity of the stimulant Jerome had brought. "Help rub his hands."

As both boys pressed and chafed the stricken man's fingers, palms and wrists, they felt a feeble warmth in them— so feeble, indeed, that they feared their task was hopeless. But they worked on and on, again administering a portion of the stimulant. At the end of twenty minutes they could see that freer circulation of blood had been established and were hopeful.

A very little later the stranger's eyelids fluttered and opened. His horse, which had watched, with almost human intelligence, everything that had been done, gave a soft, low whinny of gladness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LONE INDIAN.

"Steady, Phœbe," murmured the stranger in a dazed, uncertain way, recognizing the voice of his faithful mare, but not realizing where he was. "Sweet Phœbe," he whispered again, his eyes closing dreamily as the horse answered to his words with a delighted little neigh.

"Out of his head," whispered John Jerome in tones of sympathy.

"He must have lain here since last evening, at least," Ree answered, "and his horse has not moved from the spot. He had probably ridden up here to camp for the night and had not even

unsaddled his mare when he was shot. We must keep our eyes wide open, old chap."

"It is just such another sneaking murder as they told about at Pittsburg, Ree."

"You go back and bring up the cart, John. We may as well camp right here. It is the safest spot we can find, according to the old saying that 'lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place.'"

John hurried away to carry out this suggestion, while Kingdom prepared to build a small fire, taking the precaution to dig a hole in the earth for that purpose, and covering this nearly over with strips of green bark that the flame would be concealed and not bring the Indians down upon them.

In a short time John returned with Neb and the wagon and with blankets and fur robes a comfortable bed for the wounded stranger was soon made. While one lad prepared supper, then, the other unharnessed and unsaddled their own and the Quaker's horse and tethered them by short ropes where they might drink or

graze along the bank of the stream. It was apparent that the dapple gray had eaten nothing during the long watch over its wounded master for now the animal drank and ate most greedily.

A sort of broth, not unlike beef tea, was prepared from venison for the sick man and though the boys persuaded him to swallow some of it, he was still delirious and knew nothing of where he was or what had happened.

A more thorough examination of the stranger's condition revealed the fact that he had been shot through the left side, just over the heart, and either in falling or from the butt of a rifle or some similar instrument had received an ugly wound on his head, just back of his right ear. These injuries, added to the fact that his scalp had been carried off, made it quite miraculous that he was still alive.

"But I have heard of men living after having been scalped," said John. "Poor fellow!"

"It's a bad business; but we must pull him through," Kingdom replied with determina-

tion. "I'll watch him and the camp till midnight or after. You get some sleep, John, while you can."

As Jerome had fully expected, though he knew it was useless to remonstrate, Ree did not call him until almost daylight. Getting up, he hitched up Neb and saddled the stranger's horse, which came up to him with perfect gentleness when he called "Phœbe," the name he had heard the master use. A little later he broiled some venison steaks, and then called Ree to breakfast.

Theodore Hatch, if such was the stranger's name, though the boys doubted it, had been very restless during the night. Often in his delirium he had spoken of a letter and twice had mentioned the name of Ichabod Nesbit. How so gentlemanly appearing a man could be connected with the dead robber was more than the boys could guess, though they now considered it certain that he, as well as the precious pair of rogues they had met at the Eagle tav-

ern, had some mysterious interest in the man whom the Indian, Black Eagle, had killed.

As the stranger was still unconscious Ree and John had no fear of giving offense as they spoke of these things in his presence. Indeed, he had not the least understanding of what was taking place around him.

How to continue their journey, carrying the sick man with them, was considerable of a problem for the young travelers, as their cart was already heavily loaded; but they solved the difficulty by making a pack-horse of the stranger's mare, thus providing room under the canvas of their covered wagon to prepare a bed for the injured stranger. They raised him up and placed him upon the blankets with much effort but successfully, and before the sun was an hour high, were once more on their way.

Fifty miles ahead of them was the lonely cabin by the Cuyahoga river. A somewhat greater distance on the backward trail was Pittsburg. To the south and west almost an

equal distance was the only other semblance of civilization in all the surrounding wilderness—the missionary settlement of the Moravians.

Whether to take the wounded man to the latter place or back to Pittsburg or straight on to the cabin was a question the boys discussed at some length. The result was their decision to push on toward the Cuyahoga, and before nightfall they had traveled a good twelve miles. They saw no sign of an enemy during the day or the night which followed. The stranger continued insensible of all that was taking place, though he called out frequently, often speaking to his horse, his tones showing the deepest love for the animal. And the mare, pricking up her ears at every sound of her master's voice, exhibited for him an attachment far beyond anything of the kind the boys had ever seen.

It may have been this very love the unhappy animal had for its stricken master which resulted in the mare's giving the alarm when the two boys had almost forgotten the dangers

constantly surrounding them. For suddenly, as the sun was going down in the afternoon of the second day after the discovery of the unconscious form of Theodore Hatch, when preparations were being made to camp in a convenient gully, the horse sniffed the air and snorted and neighed violently.

Quick to realize that something was wrong, Kingdom leaped for his rifle, and had no more than secured the weapon when a bullet shrieked close to his shoulder and buried itself in a tree behind him.

"Down, John!" Ree called, but not heeding the command, Jerome, who had gone a few rods away for water, sped forward to the camp before seeking shelter behind a tree trunk.

Vigilantly both boys watched for a sight of the would-be assassin. They could see nothing but a streak of smoke curling up in the direction from which the shot had been fired. Several minutes passed, and though no sound of footsteps was heard, there came just as suddenly as before, from another direction, the

crack of a rifle and a bullet speeding so near John Jerome's head that he dropped flat on the ground.

"It looks as if we were surrounded," said Kingdom coolly, as John called out that he was not hurt.

The stranger's dapple gray was trembling with fear, though Neb, the cart horse, was not in the least disturbed.

"There's more than just a different degree of intelligence to cause that," whispered Kingdom, crouching behind a tree and cautiously peering out, John having called attention to the behavior of the horses. "I'll venture to say that the Redskins around us now are the same that scalped the stranger, and the horse knows it."

No further sign of the attacking party was seen. What had become of the foe or foes neither Ree nor John could guess, and though, when the twilight had given way to dense darkness, they took turn about in making a half dozen scouting expeditions to learn if possible

where the enemy was, and what might be expected from that source, no trace of savage or savages could be discovered.

Puzzled as they were, neither boy lay down to sleep that night, nor did they build a fire, whose light might make them easy targets.

While it was still dark Neb was hitched up, the still unconscious stranger in the cart made as comfortable as possible, and with the first light of the dawn of another day, the young emigrants were pushing on farther and deeper into the wilds, undaunted by the night's experience.

All possible care was taken to guard against surprise, however, and with much coaxing and petting and painstaking instruction Ring, the big, yellow half-mastiff, was taught to give up the place he liked best, close beside Neb, for which horse he showed a deep friendship, and follow along a hundred yards or so in the rear. Ree went ahead an equal distance, except when it was necessary to help John clear the way of trees or logs for the cart to pass, and

John himself kept a sharp lookout on either side, while driving.

So the day passed and nothing occurred further to alarm the two boys or retard their advance. But they reminded one another that they must not relax their watchfulness.

They hoped and fully believed that when they reached the country about their cabin—with all the woods near which they were well acquainted, their trouble would be at an end. If Captain Pipe, the Delaware chief, were in his village, he would permit no attack to be made upon them by Big Buffalo or any other of his tribe, and there would be only the wandering Mingoes to fear. Some of these and many others the lads had traded with and knew personally. A few presents would renew their friendship, and all would be well.

Until the cabin was reached, however, there were many dangers to be reckoned with, and these were increased by the fact that they were trying to save the life of the, to them, almost unknown man, who might have enemies they

knew not of, and who could not help them one bit, while positively delaying their progress by adding to their load and the care with which they must travel, on his account.

Camp was made, the evening following the mysterious attack, in the center of a considerable open space, nearly bare of trees, which may have been at one time an Indian corn field. The horses were picketed close to the wagon and a defense of brush and small logs was built to a height of a few feet all about the cart. The wagon's contents were then so arranged that the wounded man, who, though still delirious, seemed to be gaining in strength, was protected from stray bullets by boxes and other articles piled at either side of him.

"It seems actually foolish to go to all this trouble," was Ree Kingdom's comment as he surveyed the completed task.

Bang!—pr-r-r-r-s-s-st! A bullet whizzed through the low breast-works and flattened itself on the iron tire of the cart, close to John's left elbow.

"Look! There he goes!" cried young Jerome, and leveled his rifle at an Indian who leaped from tree to tree with most astonishing speed, traveling in a circle about the camp at a distance of eighty or ninety yards, loading his rifle as he ran, with the greatest dexterity.

In another moment, as he thought the chance was favorable, John fired. A second later Kingdom also let drive, but all to no purpose, for the next second there came from the side of the camp opposite that from which the first bullet had flown, another to keep it company, splitting a spoke in one of the cart's wheels.

No sooner had he fired this second time than the Indian disappeared in the depths of the woods.

"Land o' Goshen! What does the Redskin mean?" exclaimed John, as both boys saw him fleeing away.

"He's the same fellow that fired at us last night. Look how nervous this poor mare is. That proves it if nothing else does," answered Kingdom, boldly rising from behind the brush-

work defenses, and patting the terror-stricken horse of the stranger.

"And did you see him run?" John added. "I've heard people talk of horses going like a streak of lightning, but I never saw anything on legs get over the ground the way that buck did. I wonder, now, how long he intends keeping up this game!"

Before Ree could answer the voice of Theodore Hatch was heard loudly calling, "Nay, do not shoot! Thou art my friend. Hast thou the letter, Ichabod—Ichabod Nesbit?"

They were the most connected and intelligible words the stranger had uttered, though often in his unconsciousness he had called out, but usually in a disconnected, incomprehensible way.

"Ichabod, dost thou not know me? Thou art not dead, Ichabod! Ah, I was deceived. They told me thou wert killed by an Indian in the forest."

The boys looked questioningly one to the other. Their thoughts ran back to the frayed

letter the men at the Eagle tavern had had, and back farther still to the death of Ichabod Nesbit at the hands of Black Eagle.

"I believe he is better," said Kingdom, referring to the stranger. "His brain is clearer, though he doesn't know anything. I'll fix him up some fresh medicine."

By turns the two boys slept and watched the long night through. As before, the mysterious enemy gave no further trouble after twice firing upon the camp, and another day came and passed without incident.

Fearful of a repetition of the attack of the two preceding evenings, the young travelers made camp early this day that they might make a more secure defense than before, ere nightfall. This work they completed to their satisfaction while the sun was still shining.

The rise of ground on which they had halted gave them an advantage over their foe which they had not had before. Impatiently they watched and waited for the expected appearance of the lone savage.

"The third time's the charm, they say," remarked John, with an uneasy little laugh. "I believe we will get him or he will get us, this time."

Kingdom did not answer, and the minutes slipped slowly by. The sun was just disappearing from view, like an immense ball of red among the western trees, when the Indian came.

Both boys caught sight of him at the same moment, standing on a hill-top across a rugged little valley from themselves, quietly surveying them. As he was between them and the fading light, they saw his face, painted a bright red, and his buckskin clad figure most distinctly; and both were certain that a belt which hung loose about his waist was adorned with human scalps.

For several seconds the young savage stood gazing vacantly toward the lads. Then he saw that he was observed. Quick as magic, and as mysteriously, he disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

HIDDEN TREASURE.

“He will not come back tonight,” was Ree’s quiet comment, when the savage vanished.

“Great guns, but he’s swift!” exclaimed John, more excitedly.

“He knows we are expecting him, and we will have no trouble to-night,” said Ree, and time proved that he was right.

Early next morning the boys did have visitors, however. Two strange Indians strode up to their camp as they were preparing to move. They were the first the young men had seen in the wilderness, but they appeared friendly and remained and talked for some time.

The boys learned from the savages that nearly all the Redmen of the country had gone off to the northwest to join with the Delawares and others already there, in fighting which was expected. The Indians had kept a careful watch on the movements of General St. Clair and his troops, who, even then, were marching into the territory which now comprises northwestern Ohio, and a battle was looked for at any time.

These two Indians did not know, however, or declined to say, whether Big Buffalo, who had made the boys so much trouble on their first trip into the wilderness, had gone to join Captain Pipe and the other Delaware warriors. They likewise professed ignorance when John, in language not exactly diplomatic, demanded to know who the young Indian, who had twice fired upon them was. Shrugging their shoulders, the savages showed a desire to talk about other things, and both Ree and John were convinced that the fellows knew more than they cared to acknowledge.

For friendship's sake the young pioneers gave each of the savages a small present as they separated, and the latter promised to send other Indians whom they met to trade with the young men as the hunting season progressed. However, as so many of the Redmen had gone off to the expected scene of war, the boys realized at once that their work as traders would not be so profitable as it had been the previous winter; but, on the other hand, they would, on that account, have more time for hunting and trapping, themselves, and could also work with less frequent interruptions in the many tasks necessary to the improvement of the land for which they had paid Captain Pipe.

The wounded stranger had become more and more restless during the journey of this day, but not once did he come to his senses. Ree and John gave him the best care they could and at the same time made all haste possible, believing that if they could but reach their cabin and place the sick man on a fairly comfortable bed, they could save his life. Never-

theless it was necessary to make camp some time before sundown to be on their guard against the return of the supposed assailant of the stranger, and this they did.

But the wily savage did not appear. Perhaps he knew that he would be expected; perhaps the journey of the boys was taking him too far from his accustomed haunts to pursue them farther. The lads did not attempt to decide the question, but remained ever closely on their guard, and kept Ring, their dog, on duty as a special scout on both flanks and front and rear, most of the time, while they worked their way steadily forward.

Ring's scouting, though not so intelligent as that of a human being, of course, was very helpful to his masters; but most of all, it resulted in the making of a discovery which had a most important bearing upon the future and added a great deal indeed to the adventures which were in store for the two friends.

"It was not far from here that Ichabod Nesbit fired at us, killing our horse, last fall," said

John one evening as the boys were making camp.

“We must be somewhere near the spot. Very likely we shall pass it tomorrow,” Ree answered.

“It is not over a mile from here,” John insisted. “When Nesbit shot at us and ran back, Tom Fish and I followed after him, you remember, never thinking that Black Eagle was chasing him. I recollect noticing at the time that oak tree with the bark torn off by lightning over there. Why, it couldn’t have been very far from here that Black Eagle caught Nesbit and killed him.”

Ree had climbed into the cart to give the still unconscious stranger a drink of water and to make his bed more comfortable in preparation for the night, and gave no answer. So, thinking little more of the fate of the outlaw of whom he had been speaking, John strolled over to a fallen treetop at the edge of a little hill a dozen rods away, to gather an armful of dry wood for the fire. Ring had gone on ahead of

him and now ran down into the valley where there was a stream of water. Thinking the dog was only wanting a drink, the boy paid no attention to him, and was starting back to camp when Ring came bounding forward, with some strange object in his mouth.

“What have you found now, old fellow?” demanded John, putting his wood down; for Ring was constantly discovering bones and other things in the woods, and carrying them into camp. For answer the dog dropped the strange object at his master’s feet.

“By gravy! Where did that come from?” was John’s soliloquy, the indifference which had first marked his tones quickly disappearing.

With deep interest he examined a small, oblong, metal box, such as snuff was carried in many years ago, turning it over and over, and trying in vain to open it. The box was greatly discolored and so dingy that John was not sure of the quality of the metal, though he supposed it to be silver.

"Where'd you find it, Ring?" he asked, but the dog only wagged his tail as his head was patted.

"There's a strange thing to find in such a place as this," cried John, tossing the box to Ree, as he reached the camp. "Ring fetched it up out of the valley yonder."

"Well! What's in it?" Ree asked interestedly. "There's no name on it. Open it."

"I don't know who has a better right," was John's reply, and without more ado Ree struck the edge of the box sharply against the heavy wheel of the cart. A piece of paper, yellow and water-stained, fell to the ground as the lid flew open.

"Maybe this will tell whose box it is," said John, picking the paper up, "if it isn't too dark to read it. Why, it's only a piece of some old letter or something," he added, unfolding a long half-sheet of the size commonly known as foolscap. "There's no name at the beginning or the end, that I can see."

"It is a woman's writing," said Ree, looking

over his chum's shoulder. "But I guess it doesn't amount to much. Some poor chap's sweetheart wrote it, maybe, and he must have carried it a long while before he lost it. I wish we knew just where Ring got hold of it; for"—and Kingdom's voice sank to a whisper—"I am afraid, John, it may be another case like that of our friend in the cart here."

"But let's find out what it says," John answered impatiently.

"It is too dark. It won't do to make a target of ourselves by building enough fire to see by, and we will have to let it go till morning."

The wisdom of Ree's remark about too much firelight was very apparent, so John conquered his curiosity by joking his companion about the fear he had expressed that the snuff box might have been found upon the person of some white man cruelly murdered in the woods, as Theodore Hatch had so nearly been.

"I suppose Ring got the box out of the man's inside pocket, then buttoned his coat up again," he laughed.

It was so unusual for Ree to take a gloomy view of any circumstance or discovery, that, realizing there was not much probability, after all, that their dog had secured the box from the body of some unfortunate hunter or explorer, as he had suggested, he was quite bored by John's fun. But he did not show it; that would have been more unlike him still.

It is rather strange that, notwithstanding that they had been talking of Ichabod Nesbit just a minute or two before the strange box was found by their dog, neither of the boys thought of the outlaw in connection with the odd discovery, in all their conversation about the matter during the evening. The box they rubbed and polished and made certain it was silver, but no name or sign of whose property it might have been did they discover, except the torn piece of paper, the writing on which it was too dark to read.

The night passed without incident, and by dividing the long hours of watching over the camp and wounded stranger, both Ree and

John obtained some sleep and rest—enough that with the coming of daylight each felt more spry and fresh than at any time since the discovery of the unconscious form of Theodore Hatch had resulted in the breaking of their slumbers.

John watered the horses at the brook in the valley hard by and harnessed Neb while Ree broiled some venison and toasted some corn bread, brought from Pittsburg, for their breakfast. As they sat on a small log within their camp, eating and talking, the conversation turned at once to the silver snuff box and its written contents.

“And now read the letter, Ree; don’t keep a fellow waiting any longer,” John demanded.

Kingdom secured the box from a small chest in the cart, where it had been safely deposited over night, and as John ate away, a piece of bread in one hand, a piece of venison in the other, watching with much interest all that his friend did, the latter removed the lid and took out the yellow-stained paper.

“Why, it is not all here! The letter has been torn in two right through the middle!” he exclaimed. “We didn’t notice that last night.”

“Well, land o’ Goshen! Read what you can! I’ve been waiting all night to find out what the writing is, and now you behave as though we had no interest in the thing!” John cried with an impatient laugh.

“You read it! Look here! Now what can be made out of this?”

Together the young men studied the writing. As Ree had said, the document had been torn squarely in two lengthwise, and that which remained was so faded and so soiled that to read it was difficult. By degrees, however, the wording and letters were made out as follows:

Buried near Philadel
taining upwards of one
and hidden with it is oth
to mention several pieces
not to exceed two
explained to both of y

to each, my dear nep
for you when you shal
of this letter together,
the treasure which I
It will never be claim
shall never again re
nor have I in the na
than a few years to live.
never see either of you a
have placed in a cedar
jewels and silver are
you how to find the cask
the Bunch of Grapes inn
west, is a woodland wh
by the many charred st
trees, caused by a fire
forest there some years
great deal of damage
anyone can tell you. But
that now. It is a lonely
you will not need go at
the buried treasure. Grow
stone's throw, or perhaps
from the road are three
together. There are no oth

money and valuables I ha
twelve yards directly
yards directly north of
three trees, which is on
as you approach from the
of mullen has grown up
where the chest is hid
shall find, only as I
my separate letters to each
both share in this property,
such pains to arrange for
and the silver and the jew
be the property of whom

But I have seen to it
too deep for the plowshares
and very like it will nev
by some strange fortune,
yourselves should be the
the two halves of this le

“Well, I wish we had the other part of that letter!” cried John Jerome, his eyes sparkling.
“Somebody has been in this part of the country looking for hidden treasure!”

“It appears that that is what the whole thing

is about, but it isn't in this part of the country," said Ree, more quietly. "Don't you see, in the very beginning it says, 'Buried near Philadel'! Why, the rest of that word, which is cut away, with the other half of the letter, would make it Philadelphia, of course."

"My! but I'd like to stumble onto that chest, just the same," was John's reply. "Why, the letter tells of gold and silver and jewels—maybe it is pirates, Ree! For pity's sake, let's read it through again!"

Much less excited than his companion, Ree went over the writing once more, trying with John, but in vain, to supply the missing words at the end of each line. They could make out nothing definite, though the more they studied the more certain they were that some one had written a description of the hiding place of certain money and valuables, and then for some reason cut the paper in two.

The mystery about it all and the fascination which the possibility of finding hidden treasure has for every one, kept the two boys poring

over the writing and talking of it much longer than they thought. Time passed so quickly that half the forenoon was gone ere they could put the subject by and prepare to resume their journey.

His brain cooler and his thoughts more calm than John's, as he continued to think of the mysterious document, a happy idea came to Ree's mind and he wondered that he had not thought of it before. Why not try, with the aid of Ring, to learn just where the silver snuff box had lain? There might be something to afford some clue to the owner of the box close by, or it might be that he had been right in suggesting that some poor fellow lay cold in death not far away.

Without delay Kingdom told John of his idea, and filled with a variety of expectations, hopes and fears, that young man hailed the thought with delight. Ring was called, and the silver box held where he could see and smell it.

"Take it back, you rascal! Take it where

you found it!" commanded Ree, talking that tack with the dog, because he knew Ring would understand better than if he asked him where he had found the box.

John joined in the command, and a look of understanding coming to the dog's eyes, though the poor fellow showed that he thought he was being scolded for having done something wrong, he seized the box in his teeth and trotted away.

With a hasty glance into the cart to see that the wounded man was safe for the time being, both boys set off at a little run to follow Ring. Straight to the hillside and down into the valley the dog went, then for a considerable distance followed the stream therein.

Running around a clump of bushes, the dog disappeared from view. A half minute later, when Ree and John came up with him, he was standing beside a pile of stones half covered by brush. Under this little mound a woodchuck or skunk had burrowed, and there were

evidences that Ring had started to dig out whatever animal was inside.

“You don’t suppose the silver box came out of that hole, do you?” John asked of Ree, his tones showing disappointment.

“No, I don’t,” was the decisive answer, as Kingdom pulled away some dead branches, and lifted up a flat stone, “but I do think that the bones—”

“Of Ichabod Nesbit are under those rocks!” cried John, excitedly finishing the sentence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CABIN BY THE RIVER.

With anxious haste John began tearing away the brush from over the heap of stones which, he was now certain, covered all that remained of the body of Ichabod Nesbit, the outlaw, whom Black Eagle, the Indian, had killed a year before.

“You remember Black Eagle’s telling us that he placed stones on Nesbit’s body, don’t you?” he asked of Ree, who was working more quietly, but no less industriously than himself. “‘Put stones on him and Great Spirit never find him,’ he said, you know.”

Ree did remember these words of the Indian,

but he was thinking of something else, and said:

"We can hunt here all day, John, and we will find the bones of Nesbit under this pile of stones and brush, I'm sure; but the other half of that letter is not here. I'll tell you where it is, though. I'll bet a coonskin cap the chaps we saw at the Eagle tavern have it."

"I remember! You mean that piece of paper or letter, or whatever it was, that they were so afraid I'd see!"

"And don't you recollect how curious they were to know all we could tell them of Nesbit, and how he was killed, but especially where? As sure as shootin' they have one half of that paper telling where some one buried a fortune, and they must have known that Ichabod Nesbit had the other half! Why, it is as plain as day!"

Five minutes later the boys had completely uncovered the bones of a man. That they were those of their one-time enemy, Ichabod Nesbit, there could be no doubt. John recognized the

remnants of a blue homespun shirt which Nesbit had worn, but Ree clinched the matter by making the discovery that the skull of the skeleton was missing. For they recalled how Black Eagle had journeyed to this western country and carried away the skull to convince another Indian that he had really killed Nesbit.

"It's too bad," said Ree, quite sorrowfully. "Nesbit might have been a prosperous man if he had but used his gifts in the right way. And here he lies!"

"Thunderation! He would have killed us, if Black Eagle hadn't killed him," John broke out, almost indignantly.

"But we ought to give his bones as decent a burial as possible, 'way off here; that is what I was thinking of," Ree made answer. "Yet, we haven't time to do it now. Our friend up there may have taken a delirious spell and fallen out of the cart before we get back, as it is."

Meanwhile the boys were searching the ground about the skeleton carefully. They found nothing, however, and rightly judged

that Black Eagle had taken all of Nesbit's property which was in sight, for which he cared, at the time he killed the man.

The manner in which their dog had chanced to find the snuff box—the one thing which had not been carried away—was plain. It had fallen away from the rotted clothing still clinging to the bones, at which unknown animals had been gnawing, and was brought to light when Ring tried to get at these burrowing creatures in their holes.

Returning the stones and brush to the position in which they had found them, but agreeing to return some day and bury the skeleton properly, Ree and John lost no time in hastening back to their camp. The mystery of the snuff box and the writing in it had been partially solved, and now their thoughts were again chiefly of reaching their long-deserted cabin as speedily as possible.

Within an hour after their discovery of the lonely, last resting place of Ichabod Nesbit's body, they were again making their way far-

ther and deeper into the wilderness, one of whose manifold gloomy and terrible secrets had that morning been revealed to them. They little knew at that time what others were in store.

The young emigrants were now not a great deal more than one day of successful traveling distant from the little log house on the bluff above the Cuyahogā river, which had been, and was again to be, their home.

"We don't want to get there at dark, but should have plenty of time to look about us and get beds fixed up, and all that, when we do reach the shanty," John Jerome told his chum. "We better go just as far as we can to-day, and then maybe we can reach our house by noon to-morrow."

Ree accepted the suggestion as a good one, and, though they did their best for the sick man in the cart, Theodore Hatch, had he been possessed of his senses, would have said he had a pretty rough ride, as Neb was urged to the best possible speed over the hilly, densely

wooded country through which the little party was now traveling.

Within a mile or two after leaving camp on this day the boys passed through the valley where their horse had been shot and killed on their previous trip into the wilderness. There stood the cart they had had, practically as they had left it, but presenting a most forlorn appearance with the rank grass and low bushes growing up all about it. On examination, however, the weather-beaten vehicle was found to be in fairly good condition, and the two friends determined that some time soon they would return for it. Though they were already provided with a strong, heavy cart, it would be very convenient to have another in case of accident, and as the abandoned property was their own, there was no reason why they should not reclaim it.

With the coming of another evening camp was made not more than four miles, the boys judged, from their destination. They exercised the same care as before, and one re-

mained up with the wounded stranger and on guard until morning; but save for the unusually loud howling of a pack of wolves, finding it harder to obtain food now that winter was coming on, there was nothing to disturb the lads throughout the night.

John did guard duty from some time after midnight until dawn, and, taking a little walk not far from camp at daybreak, saw and shot a fine young deer.

"We will not want to move into our house with an empty pantry," he delightedly told Ree, the latter springing up upon hearing the discharge of the rifle.

John's elation over the killing of the deer was quite unusual. It was not that such an occurrence was uncommon or that he had made an extremely good shot; but this was a very important day to him. To Kingdom it was the same—the day to which they had looked forward for many months, and especially during the weeks since they had left Connecticut; and both were genuinely happy. The weather was

cool and bracing. Most of the trees were bare and every stream was covered with floating leaves, save where the current was strong enough to sweep them away. All nature was preparing for winter, and the effect was invigorating. It made the young pioneers anxious to do the same.

Except for the one Redskin who had shown a hostile disposition, no trouble with any Indians had been experienced. There was promise that game would be no less abundant than the previous winter, for the summer had been favorable. There was a prospect, also, of probably two weeks of Indian summer in which to get ready for the colder, stormy weather.

Thus were the hearts of the two friends light, and their hopes buoyant, as they began their last day's journey. Their progress was excellent, though the road was through the unbroken forest. Every few minutes they recognized some spot that they knew, as they drew nearer and nearer to the home they sought, and so did they come at last, when the

sun was still in midsky, to the top of the hill from which, looking across the valley to the high knoll rising beside the river, they could see the cabin they had so hurriedly left six months before.

John was driving. Ree had gone some distance in advance of the cart but was waiting for it to come up; and as though they read each other's thoughts, the two lads went forward together to a point which would afford them a complete view of the little valley whose natural clearing they had enlarged in their first work of home building.

Silently they stood side by side and gazed upon the quiet scene. There was the cabin, seemingly just as they had left it. Between it and them was the little field of corn they had planted. Indians had carried away most, if not all, of the grain, it was plain to be seen; but the stalks remaining showed that there must have been a good yield. To the right was the little plot of ground which they had ploughed, after a fashion, for potatoes. The

grass and some weeds had so grown up there, however, that it was impossible to determine at once whether this crop had grown, and if so, whether the potatoes had been stolen. Squashes and beans had been planted in the same way, and a closer investigation would need to be made to discover what had come of the work of the springtime, so far as these were concerned, also.

All in all the deserted, lonesome look which pervaded the scene made John blue and melancholy. Quick to notice this, and anxious to dispel such a feeling in his friend, Ree cheerily said:

“At any rate, John, there is a lot of grass grown up on our farm, and we will need to cut a lot of it for two horses.”

“It makes me almost homesick,” the other answered with a sigh.

“Fiddlesticks! We’ve got too much to do to be homesick! Wait here and keep your eye on the cart while I scout over to the cabin. I’ll be back and help you down the hill, but we want

to know that all is serene before we drive into the open."

So saying, Ree trotted down the hill, skirted the edge of the forest a little way, and then, seeing that all was quiet, walked quickly across the clearing and up the steep slope to the rude little house. An involuntary, almost imperceptible shudder passed over him as he noticed at once the deep dents in the heavy door of the cabin, recalled the attack which Big Buffalo had led upon them, and saw a great dark blot upon the threshold, which he knew had been dyed there by blood of that fight.

But putting the gloomy thought from his mind, with a determination such as he well knew how to exercise, he pulled the latch-string still hanging out, and pushed open the door. A damp, musty odor greeted him, and with only a hasty glance inside, and leaving the door open to admit the fresh air, he turned and hurried across the valley and up the hill to where John was waiting.

"Keep your eyes wide open, Ree," Jerome

called out as Kingdom came near, "that sneaking Redskin is not far away!"

As all had been very quiet it was hard to understand what John meant, but the latter pointed to Phœbe, the wounded Quaker's mare, as Ree asked for information, and it was enough. The poor beast was terror-stricken as when before it had scented that lone savage who had so nearly killed its master.

"I haven't seen a thing," Jerome went on, "but I'll wager that the mare is not mistaken."

As though in emphatic confirmation of John's words, a rifle sounded and a bullet sped through the canvas of the covered cart.

In an instant Return Kingdom's weapon was in readiness. A streak of darker hue against the background of the trees mid which he was watching, darted like a shadow between two large oaks. Quick as lightning the boy fired.

A piercing yell followed Ree's shot. John, no slower than his companion to see the flitting form of the Indian, dashing away among the

trees, also fired just as the savage screamed. But there came no answering bullet or sound.

"I rather guess we got him—one of us," said John, exultingly. "I never saw so slippery a heathen, though. He glides along fast as an arrow and with no more noise. Why, his feet hardly touched the ground!"

Having quickly reloaded his rifle, Ree was watching keenly in all directions; but when no sight or sound of the wary savage appeared, he replied to his friend's remark.

"Slippery as an eel; maybe we *have* finished him."

Careful search, however, failed to reveal to the boys any trace of the Indian whose body John had been quite confident they would find stretched upon the leaves not far away. As he had done before, the fellow had disappeared instantly and completely as a puff of thin smoke in a raging gale.

Considerably disturbed, the lads took their cart and horses down the hill and into the open space between the forest and the cabin, with

the greatest caution. They had hoped they were quit of their mysterious foe, and his sudden reappearance, when there had been reason to believe he was far away, was more than annoying.

“At any rate we will have four good, strong walls between ourselves and the murderous scamp to-night,” said John Jerome, as they drove up the hill to the cabin. “It is funny that on our other trip we were mysteriously shot at in just this way.”

“It is probably the fellow they told us of in Pittsburg,” Kingdom answered. “I am glad he hasn’t tried to shoot the horses; maybe he will let them alone. We will have to build a lean-to for them, right away.”

In a few minutes the journey which had taken so long was over. The cart of the young pioneers was drawn up before the cabin door, and there was so much to be done in the next hour or two that the prowling Redskin might have been more successful in his secret attacks than he had yet been, had he improved

the opportunity. Fortunately he did not, and in a short time a bright fire was driving the chill, damp air from the little log house, and a bed was fixed up in a snug corner and Theodore Hatch was carried to it. The horses were watered and tethered near the door, and a late dinner was prepared by John, while Ree proceeded with the unloading of the cart.

Though still unconscious and so weak that he could scarcely lift his hand, his threshing about and calling out in delirium long since over, no one seemed to feel the change in the situation more than did the wounded stranger. As was his custom, Ree gave him the best attention in his power, before eating his own dinner, and as he did so, could not but notice the change for the better which his patient showed. And he was not greatly surprised by the greater change soon following.

Sitting astride a chest, a pewter plate between them, the young pioneers were eating their noonday meal when a groan came from the stranger's rude couch. Immediately Ree

was at the man's side to make his position more comfortable, and John arose to help, if necessary.

Slowly the Quaker's eyes opened. Slowly there came into them a gleam of intelligence he had not hitherto shown. Ree stooped to adjust the coarse pillow under the injured head.

"I fear I have been ill. What place is this, young friend?"

It was the voice of Theodore Hatch, low and weak, but clear and sane. No sound could have given Return Kingdom or John Jerome greater pleasure than this indication that their work and worry and constant efforts to save the life of this man, a stranger, but a human being and brother white man still, would be rewarded by seeing him recover. But his tones were so pitifully feeble and his loss of strength so complete, that John turned away, tears in his eyes.

"You are still sick, and must lie very quiet," Ree answered the unfortunate man in a gentle

voice. "You are with friends who will do anything they can for you."

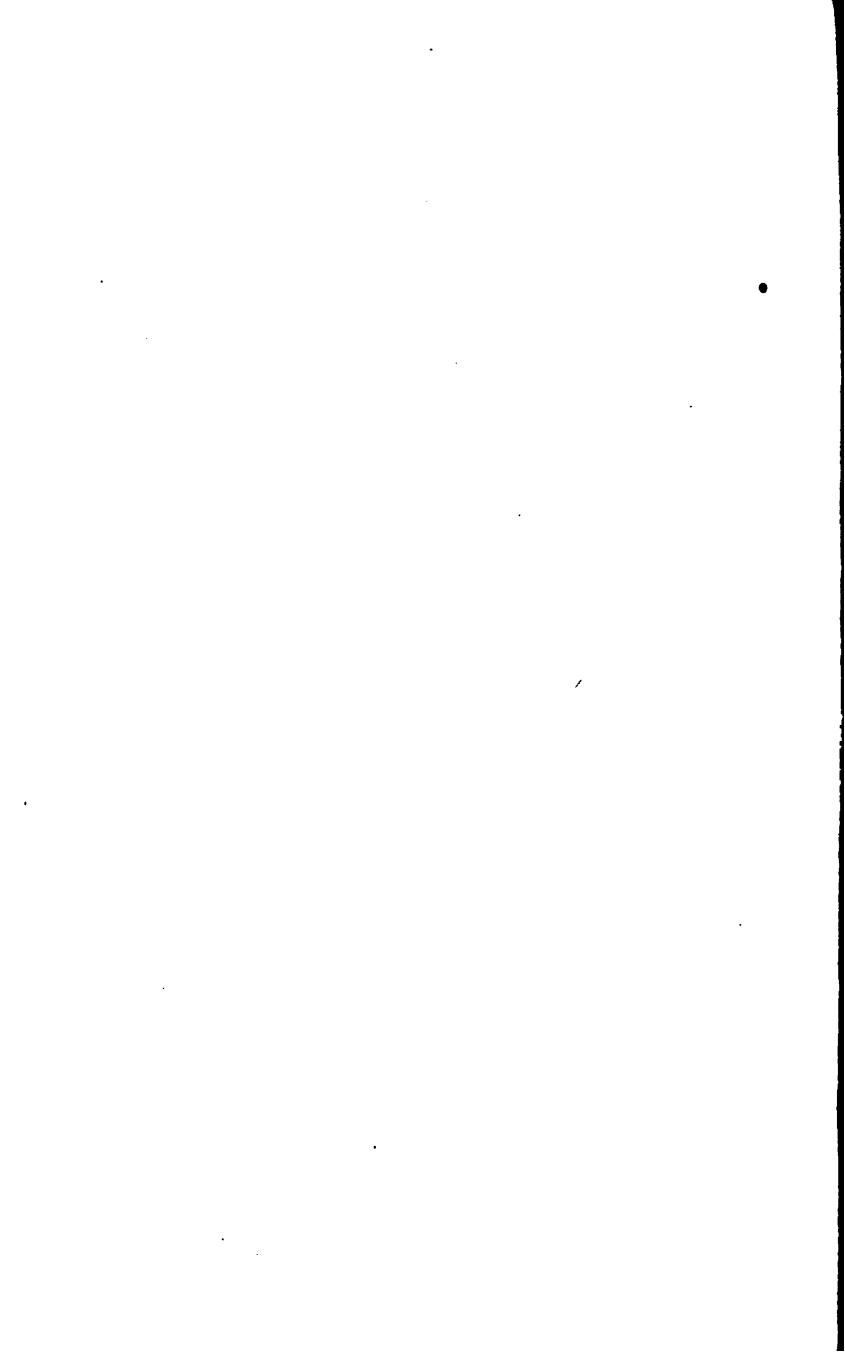
It seemed to take a full minute for the man's injured brain to comprehend what was said to him. At last he seemed to remember what had happened. There came a look of great alarm upon his face, and in husky, deeply anxious tones he said, struggling to rise up:

"Hast seen my saddle bags? Where—where are they? Surely—surely—"

"Here they are, all safe and sound," John answered, as Ree gently bore the sufferer down on his bed again; and as he felt his property placed in his hands, the wounded Quaker, holding them with all his remaining strength, allowed his eyes to close. Soon he slept and it required no doctor to tell that the crisis had been passed and Theodore Hatch was on the way to health again.



"Was I scalped?" he gasped
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CHAPTER VII.

THE REWARD OF VIGILANCE.

“Have you ever seen what’s inside those saddle bags, Ree?”

John Jerome asked the question when it was certain that Theodore Hatch was sleeping, and the more comfortably because the property to which reference was made was clasped under his arm.

“I took a shirt out of the bags, you know, to make bandages. There was nothing in them that I saw to make him so anxious about them,” Kingdom answered. “Of course I didn’t see anything in them, nor look for anything except something to tie up his wounds with.”

“That man at Fort Pitt thought he had gold in the bags, that he kept them close by him all the time, you remember,” John went on. “Now I don’t think there is any gold in them, but maybe the other half of that letter about those hidden valuables is there; that’s what I’ve been thinking; for don’t you know how at first he would call out for Ichabod Nesbit and ask if he had the letter, and all that? Yes sir, Mr. Hatch will be able to tell all about the paper we found in Nesbit’s snuff box, when he comes to enough and gets strong.”

“You are wrong, John; see if you aren’t. Because if this man has the other part of the letter, and was looking for Nesbit to get the part he had, to put the two together, what was that paper that Duff and Dexter had at the Eagle tavern? Then, too, Duff and Dexter were just such rough fellows as Nesbit and might have been associated with him. But you can’t imagine this respectable Quaker and Nesbit having anything to do with one another, can you?”

Still John would not give in to Ree's way of thinking, and as the argument was delaying their work when there was much to be done, the talk was discontinued.

The short afternoon came to a close before the boys were fully prepared for evening. Their goods were all unpacked and carried into the cabin, where they lay in confusion. A great pile of dry wood had been carried in, and fresh, dry leaves gathered for beds, but no provision had been made for shelter or protection for the horses, and there were numerous spots in which the cabin walls needed re-chinking to keep out the wind; the hot summer sun having baked the mud so dry that in places it had fallen away from between the logs.

Without a word, when their supper was over, Kingdom, taking a large blanket, hung it before the fire in such a way that the cabin was made quite entirely dark.

"What's that for?" demanded John.

"You'll see. Now I'm going out, and you close the door after me. With the blanket be-

fore the fire, any one who might be watching will need to look pretty close to see the door opened and closed. And I'm going to stay outside all night, keeping in the shadow where I won't be seen, and watch the horses and at the same time watch for that slippery Redskin. If I can capture him, I'm going to do it."

John started to answer, protesting that Ree must not take the whole night of guard duty upon himself; but his chum interrupted him:

"We must appear to have gone to bed and be sound asleep, so let the fire die down early. One of us must be inside to watch Mr. Hatch, anyway, and you must do that. When my eyes get used to the darkness I can see all around the clearing, and all I'll want of you is that you be ready if I call you. If we are going to be spied upon, we want to know it from the start."

Saying no more, Kingdom slipped out of the darkened cabin and to the darkest side of the building.

Quickly John closed the door, and drew the blanket from in front of the fireplace. He saw

the wisdom of Ree's plan clearly, and was ready to do his part. Hard as it was to remain awake when he had planned on a good, sound sleep, as they were carrying in leaves to make soft beds, he resolved not to close his eyes. He fixed a snug place in the chimney corner for the dog, Ring, and then, as the stranger was resting comfortably, to all appearances, he found a seat on a deerskin on the floor, and with his back against another, spread over a chest, settled himself to wait and listen.

As the wind moaned dismally about the cabin and the swish and tinkle of the water of the river below came to his ears, he thought of Ree outside in the cold, and remembered how ever ready his chum was to take upon himself their greatest burdens. Then he recalled the necessity of their being ever keenly watchful, and admiring Ree the more, as he thought of their danger, told himself again that he must not shut his eyes. Almost at the same moment his chin dropped upon his chest, and, completely worn out, he succumbed to the pleasant

warmth, to which he had not lately been accustomed, and fell sound asleep.

By no means afraid, for he was almost fearless, but considerably worried by the antics of the Indian, who seemed able to appear and disappear in a most startling and mysterious manner, whenever he chose to do so, Kingdom stationed himself in the shadows close to the cabin wall, and vigilantly watched in all directions. He was protected from the wind, but the night air was cold and raw, and for want of exercise he became quite chilled.

From all sides came at intervals the discordant howls and screams of the beasts of the forest. The melancholy dirges of the wind among the trees added to the general gloom. Still Kingdom courageously remained at his post, though as the hours dragged by, and even the horses, grazing a few yards from the cabin door, were undisturbed, he felt that his labor was lost.

Remembering, however, that the whole object of his having undertaken this plan of

vigilance was to find out whether Indians or other foes were spying upon himself and John, and knowing that unless he watched all night he would not know positively whether prowlers had been about, the lad straightened himself up and with renewed determination put behind him a great temptation to go in and lie down, and turn Ring out to keep guard until morning. Still he saw no sign of any known or unknown enemy and his interest in his self-imposed task was beginning to wane again, when a sound of footfalls in the leaves at the edge of the forest, to the left of the cabin, came to him.

Grasping his rifle closer, Ree strained both ears and eyes to detect the coming of—he was sure it could be no one else than the Indian who had been following upon their trail. In another second there came out of the woods two figures, carrying a canoe between them.

Ree could not at once make out whether they were Indians or white men in rough frontier dress. Their burden seemed heavy, and as they came nearer, heading toward a low place

in the bank beside the river, he observed that the canoe was well filled, which accounted for its seeming to weigh a great deal. At the same time he discovered that the two men were Indians. What were they doing? Why were they traveling by night, in this manner?

Unseen by the Redskins, Ree watched them narrowly. They had approached to within one hundred yards of him to reach the river just at the foot of the steep slope leading down from the cabin, and so avoid going around a growth of bushes upon the bank, to get to the water.

Even in the dim moonlight the white boy saw them clearly. Suddenly as a lightning flash, he realized what the savages were doing. He recognized the canoe they carried. It was his own and John's—the one which, with other property that they had been unable to take with them, they had hidden in a great hollow log a quarter of a mile away, when leaving the cabin to hurry to Connecticut.

It was more than probable that these two In-

dians had found the canoe some time before and had planned to steal it. Their discovery that the two boys had returned and would soon regain possession of the craft and their other belongings prompted the Redskins to make haste to carry the canoe and goods away before this should happen.

Sure that he was correct in thus reasoning, but desirous of making no hard feelings with the Indians over the matter, Ree adopted a novel plan. As the savages set their burden down preparatory to the launching of the canoe, the boy walked quickly toward them.

"How do, friends," he called. "It's real kind of you to bring us our canoe so soon."

Never were two savages so completely taken by surprise, or more at a loss to know what to do or say. There was such kindness in Kingdom's tones that they were not sure whether his remark was meant to be sarcastic or not.

One of the Indians made a leap as though he would run away. The other, with the savage "Ugh!" uttered in a tone so ridiculously crest-

fallen that Kingdom could hardly suppress a laugh, stood still.

Walking quickly up to the Redskin, Kingdom gave him a hearty handshake, seeing which the other Indian approached, somewhat after the manner of a small boy who fears punishment, and also shook hands.

Ree would have liked to talk with the Indians and learn the general situation as to the progress of hostilities in the northwest and the state of affairs along the frontier, but they were too chagrined to remain. The two agreed, however, to return at some future time for presents. Kingdom promised them in return for their having carried the canoe and its heavy load to the cabin.

He recognized them, just before they were leaving, as Beaver Hair and Long Arrow, Mingoes who had called at the cabin once or twice the previous winter, and was anxious to make friends of them. This he undoubtedly succeeded in doing, for the savages knew that had he been disposed to open fire upon them he

could probably have killed them both; and in their eyes he would have been justified in doing so, having caught them in the act of stealing.

Long afterward it developed that Beaver Hair and Long Arrow were, as was true of most Indians, honest; but they had obtained fire water of a trader near where the Cuyahoga empties into Lake Erie, and were not in their right senses when, as they were paddling up the river, they discovered that the boy traders had just returned to the cabin, and they, having long ago discovered where the canoe was hidden, concealed themselves to await a favorable time for carrying the property off.

That they were caught in the act they attributed to two things, the anger of the Great Spirit and the keen scent of Kingdom, whom from that night they called "White Fox"; for they believed that it was some powerful sense of smell possessed by Ree which had awakened him and resulted in their being discovered.

Kingdom watched the two Indians as they disappeared down the river, and as he walked

up the slope to the cabin, looking carefully for any other visitors, he saw the gray light of another day upon the eastern horizon. Still he loitered in the darker shadows, but when it was well-nigh daylight, and all continued quiet, he quietly entered the cabin, thinking to get some rest.

Fast asleep, just as he had settled himself down to wait and watch, his back against a skin-covered chest, Ree found John, and smiled as he immediately guessed that his chum had set out to remain awake all night, and resolved to have some fun. Thin ice had formed on a shallow puddle of water at the foot of the hill, and securing a small piece Ree placed it on John's bare head. For a few seconds the sleeper did not stir, but just as the cold was penetrating to the scalp and John moved uneasily, Ree spoke in deep, unnatural tones:

"Injun get scalp heap quick! Heap nice scalp!"

With a yell, John leaped to his feet, his

hands flying to his head only to encounter his wet hair.

Ree had leaped into a corner where he was not immediately seen, while John, his senses not yet collected, but bewildered and really alarmed, seized his rifle and sprang to a loop hole. In another moment, however, he heard his friend's laughter. Then he guessed what had happened; but he did not look around. Still staring out of the loop hole, he said in the most ordinary tone:

"Looks as though it would be a nice day, Ree."

"It was quite a chilly night," Kingdom answered in the same manner, stirring the coals of the fire, and getting down on his knees to blow them.

And not once that day was the joke referred to. Afterward John said that the first impression he had as he felt the ice on his head was that his hair was on fire.

John was much surprised but equally pleased as he learned of Ree's adventure of the night,

and could not wait until after breakfast to run down to the foot of the slope to inspect the canoe. He found that it was only a little warped by reason of having been out of the water all summer, and the kettle and other articles they had left with it, were also in good condition.

Awakened from his long sleep at last, but still keeping his precious saddle bags under one arm, Theodore Hatch was telling Ree that he felt much improved, as John returned to the cabin.

Indeed, the mysterious stranger was looking vastly better than at any time yet, and when breakfast was ready, ate quite heartily, propped up on the rude bed he occupied. He inquired about his mare, Phœbe, before he asked anything else, and that led to the telling of the whole story of how he had been found and cared for by the boys. With much feeling the Quaker expressed his gratitude.

"I was traveling into the wilderness unarmed," he said. "I am a man of peace, as

are all those of our faith. I have met hostile Indians at different times, but when they saw who and what I was, they made no movement toward molesting me. I cannot understand why I was attacked, but it must have been because of the failing light, and my assailant, whoever he was, may not have seen rightly. It was just at evening as I prepared to spend the night beside a little thicket. I saw no one, but heard a shot and fell with the wound in my side. I was still conscious as a young Indian ran up to me and beat me on the head with his hatchet. Then I knew no more."

As he spoke, Theodore Hatch put up his hand to feel his injured head. A look of horror and mental anguish came to his face.

"Was I scalped?" he gasped.

John was almost ready to laugh over the Quaker's despairing tone, but kept a straight face, and Ree in answer to the question soberly nodded.

"The poor, deluded sinner," groaned the stranger. "I have forgiven mine enemies al-

ways—always. I must—I will—aye, I do, truly forgive him. He did not know I was a man of peace. Oh, why did I come into these forests?"

"Well, why did you, sir?" asked John Jerome, quite respectfully, but brimming over with curiosity, as he remembered the Quaker's embarrassment when the name of Ichabod Nesbit had been mentioned at Pittsburg. He turned around on his three-legged stool and looked the older man squarely in the face as he asked the question, but Ree to hide his embarrassment rose and looked out of a loop hole.

The stranger made no answer, but giving Jerome a startled, searching look, seemed to hug the saddle bags under his arm the closer.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATE OF BLACK EAGLE.

"I think Mr. Hatch better not talk any more now," said Return Kingdom, quickly looking around and noticing the Quaker's flushed, excited manner. "You must be careful, you are still so weak," the boy continued, adjusting the straw-filled bolster for the man to lie down again.

"I didn't mean any harm by my question," John spoke up, quietly.

"Thou didst no harm, young friend, but almost frightened me," the stranger answered.

So the incident passed leaving the boys more curious than ever to know the history and true identity of Theodore Hatch. Ree would not

confess that he was especially anxious to learn these things, because his fear of wounding the man's feelings would not permit him to question the stranger; but John openly vowed that he meant to find out just who and what the stranger was, and would do so sooner or later. And in time the boys did ascertain all they could have wished to know, but in ways quite unexpected.

"There's a lot of work to be done, building a horse shed and all," said Ree, when the two friends were outside the cabin after the talk with Theodore Hatch, "but in spite of that, one of us should go back along the trail and bury the bones of Ichabod Nesbit. I'm afraid that some day our Quaker will ask to be taken to the place, and he would not think very well of us if he found things just as they were left."

John fell in with this suggestion heartily, but it was agreed that there would be time to perform the task spoken of, two or three days later, and meanwhile some inkling of the whereabouts of the lone Indian might be obtained.

Thus it was that after some discussion it was decided that Ree should go that very day to the village of the Delawares on the lake a few miles away, to learn all he could of this particular savage and the disposition of the Indians in general, while at the same time he showed the people of Captain Pipe, the Delaware chief-tain, that the lads desired to renew their friendly relations with them. John would remain with the stranger to care for him and guard the cabin, giving his work the while to cutting small logs with which to build a barn.

Taking some presents for the Delawares, Ree set out at about nine o'clock, promising to be home by dark. John shouldered his axe and went to work. It had been Ree's first plan to make his trip on horseback, but resolving that it would be safer to slip through the woods very quietly until he found out just what the situation with reference to the Indians was, he traveled on foot, and soon found himself upon the familiar portage trail leading from the Cuya-

hoga river to the headwaters of the Tuscarawas.

Ree knew the way perfectly, for he had traveled the route several times the previous winter. He felt no harm for his safety, but kept his eyes wide open and pushed forward among the great oaks and beech trees stealthily and rapidly. He saw no Indians but once or twice when splendid shots of game might have been made, he ignored them for safety's sake. Leaving the beaten trail after an hour's traveling, he made directly through the woods to the lake. Without seeing any human creature he approached the Indian town.

An air of loneliness hung over the place. Instead of smoke rising from two score or more of fires, in and among the rude log and bark houses and wigwams, the few columns of blue vapor which ascended seemed to show that the village was almost deserted.

This was true. No one remained in the usually lively home of Captain Pipe save a number of children and old men and squaws.

"How—ugh!" grunted an old warrior, smoking his pipe in a sunny place. He recognized Ree at once and held out his hand.

In a few minutes a half dozen aged men of the tribe had gathered around and all gave the young trader welcome. They could speak little English and though Ree knew some Delaware words their efforts at conversation were so poorly rewarded that one of the Indians went to call an interpreter.

To Ree's surprise and pleasure the person summoned was Gentle Maiden, the daughter of Captain Pipe, a young woman thoroughly deserving of the pretty name the Moravian missionaries had bestowed upon her. From them she had learned the language of the "Long-knives" and with her Kingdom could communicate readily.

Gentle Maiden had no hesitancy in answering questions. She said her father and his warriors were still in the northwest country and might be absent all winter. Even lately runners had been in the neighborhood to call

all able-bodied men to join the braves who had first gone forth for the expected fighting, and no Indians remained in the vicinity save those who were too old to go to war, and some of the women and children.

“And Big Buffalo?” asked Ree, referring to the Redskin who had given himself and John so much trouble and from whom he had made his escape in the nick of time after the attack upon their cabin.

“Big Buffalo is with the rest,” said Gentle Maiden.

“There is an Indian—not a Delaware, I think—but one who roams the forests alone and is not a friend of the Palefaces. What of him? He is still about here?”

“He is not of my father’s people,” was the Indian girl’s answer.

“You know who he is?”

“There are many wanderers in the forests; many of our race have been driven, even like yonder leaves in the wind, before the coming of the Long-knives.”

The answer puzzled Kingdom. It was apparent that the Indian girl wished not to tell what she knew of the mysterious Redskin, and that her sympathy was with him, though she declared herself still friendly to the young traders who had bought land of her father a year earlier.

With genuine Indian hospitality the Indians brought food for Ree, but he noticed that it was of inferior quality and not so generous in quantity as usual—only a handful of parched corn. He ate, however, to show his friendliness, and after a time, leaving his gifts, a string of glass beads and a large pocket knife, with the Delawares, bade them good-bye.

Reaching home some time before sundown, Ree found that John had passed a quiet, busy day. Under these favorable circumstances, as he was almost completely exhausted by his long hours of watchfulness the night before, this following, too, upon many nights of broken rest, he said that Ring might do guard and both himself and John would turn in early. To this

the latter would not listen, however, saying he would remain awake to keep an eye on the horses lest some wild beast attack them, if nothing more. He could remain in the cabin and do this, peering frequently through a loop hole, he said.

This, their second night in the cabin, passed quietly. Once toward morning Phoebe, the Quaker's mare, snorted and trembled violently, but John saw or heard no cause for alarm, though the horse's action undoubtedly indicated that the lone Indian was somewhere near.

Agreeing that this was almost certainly the case, the boys were especially watchful as they were about their work next day and for many days afterward. No night passed, either, until their lean-to stable was completed, but that one of the young men stood guard, much to the alarm of Theodore Hatch, who feared an attack upon the cabin at any time.

This thought did not worry either Ree or John. The tactics of their solitary foe, they were now certain, were not to fight in the open,

but to shoot from some safe distance; and he had shown such fear for his own safety by always disappearing immediately after he had fired a shot, that both lads held him more or less in contempt. Still, they realized the constant danger the Redskin placed them in, and though they had not made an open agreement to that effect, each boy knew that he wanted only the proper opportunity to shoot the Indian dead.

How differently they felt afterward, at least for a time, had no bearing on their plans at this time. They only knew that it was a case of kill or be killed.

The days passed rapidly. There was so much to do that it seemed that deep snows might make hunting a difficult task rather than a pleasure, before they could get to it. No sooner was the barn built than the corn, or all that remained of it, had to be gathered and stored away—the fodder stacked against the stable, the ears hung over the rafters of the cabin,—and the few scattered potatoes which

remained, harvested. Of the latter there was scarcely more than enough for seed for the following spring, and to supplement their store of food in addition to the meat they might always have, nuts were gathered—beech nuts, chestnuts, hickory nuts and butternuts.

When all this had been done there was grass to be stored away for the horses. It scarcely deserved the name of hay—the long grass which grew in open spots along the valley; but quite a large stack of it was laboriously harvested with no tools other than a scythe and home-made rake.

Thus more than two weeks passed, and Theodore Hatch, as much a mystery as ever, was becoming strong enough to dress himself and walk about for a few minutes at a time, when Ree again reminded John of the necessity of their giving the bones of Ichabod Nesbit a decent interment. The result was that John proposed to go himself, on horseback, the following day, and perform the task referred to.

So it was agreed, and allowing the Quaker to

rest under the impression that he was going back along their trail only to bring up the old cart, which for more than a year had stood exposed to the weather in the ravine where it had been left, John started off at daylight on a clear, frosty morning. The fine air and the beautiful, peaceful quiet of the woods, broken only by the occasional call of wild turkeys or the chattering of squirrels and other small animals, put the younger of the boy pioneers in a most happy frame of mind.

Neb, having done little work for more than a fortnight, was also in high spirits and needed no urging to trot or gallop wherever the forest was sufficiently open to permit it. Good progress being made, therefore, horse and rider reached and crossed the gully where the abandoned cart stood, by the middle of the forenoon. Proceeding more slowly then, for the trail was becoming more difficult for traveling, they approached the spot they sought.

"I don't mind the ride at all, but I shan't enjoy playing sexton, I know," John was saying

to himself, as he dismounted to lead Neb down the hill sloping to the brook beside which Ichabod Nesbit's bones lay, and casting about for a suitable place to tie the horse.

"Hark!"

John spoke beneath his breath, and his heart beat fast. Angry voices came to his ear, and they were not far away.

Slipping the bridle rein over a branch, the lad went cautiously forward, keeping behind the thicket which skirted the stream.

Again the voices were heard. Undoubtedly they were those of white men engaged in violent argument.

"'Twas the Quaker, blast him!" one coarse voice exclaimed. "And you, you Indian dog, said not a word about him till now! Why didn't you tell us you had told him where you killed the man?"

Scarcely was this sentence spoken when John reached a point not more than fifty feet from the source of the angry contention where he

could see, but, hidden by the thick brush, escaped being seen.

There stood Duff and Dexter, the men he and Ree had met at the Eagle tavern, and also Hank Quilling, the proprietor of that disreputable establishment. With them was an Indian,—and—could it be possible that he was associating with such rogues?—John almost whistled for amazement. The Redskin was his old friend, Black Eagle.

Duff was speaking. His rage was terrible as he pointed his finger menacingly at the Indian and cried out, as the Mohawk stood haughtily erect, his arms folded upon his chest, though his eyes flashed.

“Blast your red hide! I could—by the Eternal, I *will*—kill you!”

With a tremendous oath, the white man raised his rifle and quick as flash discharged it, the muzzle almost touching Black Eagle’s body.

It was all over in an instant. The bullet sped

to the Indian's heart; the poor fellow fell senseless, dying at his slayer's feet.

"Lord, man! Would you bring a whole tribe of warriors down on us? An' us away off here—"

It was the proprietor of the Eagle tavern who was speaking now, gasping the words chokingly, frightened and dazed by the brutal murder committed.

Before he could say more, John Jerome sprang among them. So quickly and noiselessly had he emerged from the brush that he was not seen till his angry voice came shrill and harsh:

"You fiends! You fiends! Oh, I hope I'll see you hanged for this! What does it mean? Shooting Black Eagle down like a wolf—or—or a beast! And he was more a decent man than all three of you!"

With a curse upon the boy, Duff sprang forward and bore him down. Together they fell heavily, the murderer foaming at the mouth like a mad dog, in the violence of his rage, his

evil, disfigured face almost black and horrible to behold, while his companions stood aghast.

“Don’t get us into no trouble, Duff! You don’t know what yer doin’ when yer blood’s up!” Dexter protested, hurrying to the combatants and trying to draw his villainous companion away, the man and boy rolling over and over in their fierce struggle.

“Make short work of it, Duff, whatever you do! There’s another o’ them boys, an’ he may be here any minute—an’ Injuns, too!” yelled Quilling, the landlord, jumping about in his fear and excitement, and ending with—“Fight it out, dang ye! Ye’ve had a noose round yer neck ’fore now, but nobody kin say I killed the boy!”

And with these words the fellow threw his rifle over his shoulder and ran.

“Won’t do no good to kill him—won’t do no good, Duff,” Dexter kept gasping, still trying to pull his friend away, though his efforts were puny as a child’s.

“Curse you—curse you for two cowardly

fools!" Duff yelled, again and again, vainly trying to get his hands on John Jerome's throat. And then he looked to see whither Quilling had retreated.

The boy, struggling beneath the man's greater weight, needed no better opportunity. He managed to get one foot quickly free and letting it drive with all his force against his assailant's middle, sent the fellow rolling upon the ground.

The next second John was upon his feet, his rifle at his shoulder. Dexter was already running to overtake the fleeing landlord, and Duff, picking himself up, looked first at John, then at his runaway friends.

"Boy," he said, slowly and distinctly, in tones more of deep, deliberate hate than anger, "I was minded to kill you the night you spied on us at that dirty hole of Quilling's. There are reasons why I am going to let you go again"—

"Yes, here's one!" snapped the boy, defiantly raising his rifle.

“You impudent — but I’m not through with you yet.” Duff’s voice was low, though deeply, bitterly threatening. But he was interrupted—

“Now you march!” commanded John Jerome, and his voice was stern and sharp. “I’ll let daylight into that black heart of yours, right here, and now, if you don’t!”

Boldly, not once turning his head to see if the rifle’s muzzle still covered him, Duff strode away; but he called to his companions:

“Run, you blasted idiots! but I miss my guess if I don’t know who’s got something you’d like blasted well to get hold of!”

As the rough fellow disappeared among the trees, John still watching, an Indian, who, unobserved, had seen the killing of Black Eagle, stole away through the bushes and vanished as silently as he had come and as he had watched.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAMP IN THE TREE-TOP.

Until Duff was out of view John held his rifle ready for immediate use. As he turned from watching the retreating figure of the wretch, his gaze fell upon the outstretched form of the dead Indian—the staring, lustreless eyes and powder-burned, blood-stained body presenting a horrid sight. Near by the brush and stones were thrown aside and the bones of Ichabod Nesbit were scattered all about.

“I see it all now,” came slowly and solemnly from the boy’s lips. “It is plain as anything ever was! It was the letter they wanted; and to think that those miserable cut-

throats made poor Black Eagle come all this distance to show them where Ichabod Nesbit lay, only to shoot him down in such a manner, when they didn't find it! What was it that Duff was saying, too? Ree will want to know every word: 'It was the Quaker, blast him!' that is what he said. 'And you, you Indian dog, said nothing about him.' Well! I wonder if Theodore Hatch wasn't on his way here to find that letter, himself, and if Black Eagle didn't direct him where to come. Poor Black Eagle! Ichabod Nesbit was the cause of your death at last."

So communing with himself in thoughts and frequent murmured words, John spent a half hour so deeply buried in his reflections concerning the murder of the unfortunate Indian, the likelihood that the murderer might be brought to the rope's end as he so richly deserved, and the mystery of the letter describing the buried treasure, that he did not realize how swiftly time was passing.

A loud whinny from Neb brought the pon-

dering lad to the remembrance that he had much to do, and that already it was noon. Hurrying up the hill he obtained the shovel, fastened to Neb's harness as a means of carrying it conveniently, and led the horse nearer the scene of his labors.

His first task would be to dig a grave; but a new problem appeared. Undoubtedly he must bury the body of Black Eagle as well as the bones of Nesbit. It seemed too dreadful to place them together—the remains of this white man who had killed the Indian's son, and those of the Indian who had been revenged for the act, only to meet his own death after showing Palefaces, whom he believed to be friends, where the outlaw's body lay.

"Yes, there will have to be two graves," John decided, and a glance at the sun told him he must work hard if he was to return to the cabin before another day.

Fortunately the earth was not frozen beneath its thick covering of leaves, and except for the many roots he encountered, the lonely young

sexton of the wilderness made rapid progress. One trench of sufficient length and depth for the purpose, at the foot of a large ash tree, which could be made to serve as a headstone, he had completed when a rustling of the leaves caused him to look quickly up. Duff, Dexter and Quilling stood before him, the last named grinning wolfishly over John's surprise.

"Who killed the Indian known as Black Eagle?" asked Duff, in cold accusing tone, pointing his finger at the boy, who had hastily thrown down his shovel and picked up his rifle, instead.

"That's him," chorused Dexter and Quilling, pointing their fingers also at John.

"Who saw him do it?"

"All three of us," came the answer.

"You swear that this is true?"

"That's what we do; we saw him shoot the Indian," came the reply.

"Now, boy," Duff began, calmly sitting down on a log, his rifle in both hands, while his eyes never left the face of the lad he so

monstrously accused, "you heard what was said. They've hanged men for killing peaceable Redskins before now, and will do it again. Just let us tell what we know at Fort Pitt, and you are pretty likely to stretch a rope. You killed Black Eagle; we saw you do it—never mind, now! Let me talk! I say we saw you shoot the Indian down. We can set all the Mingoes west of the Ohio against you, or we can have you hanged. We haven't just decided which we'd rather do."

"Why, you—you black liar, what are you talking about?" cried John, succeeding at last in getting a word in, as Duff paused. "Do you suppose—"

"Never you mind what I suppose; but we can make you a heap of trouble, because, you know, we saw you kill the Indian—shoot him down in cold blood."

And here a villainous smile flitted over the marked and loathsome face of the wretch; but he scarcely paused, and there was no suspicion

of a smile in the cold harshness of his voice as he went on:

“We can make you and the pompous young gentleman you call Kingdom sweat blood, or hang your scalps on the belts of the Mingoes, without the least trouble to ourselves. But we don’t propose to do that. We have nothing against you young shavers, and don’t want to have. All we want is the paper writing you got from the body of Ichabod Nesbit. Oh yes, we know you got it. What were you coming here to bury the bones for, if you didn’t?”

As one who thinks he has asked a question which cannot be answered, Duff, squinting in a most horrid manner and shaking his finger viciously, paused for a reply.

John was thinking fast. He knew that the murderous trio who faced him would not hesitate to kill if they thought he had the missing half of the hidden fortune letter in his possession. He also knew from the words he had heard Duff use in speaking of Black Eagle, that he had at first believed the letter had fallen into

the Quaker's hands. Did he know where that gentleman then was? It was hardly likely.

In infinitely less time than the telling of it requires, the alert young pioneer thought of these things and without even seeming to hesitate, he answered:

“You'll have to tell me what you are trying to get at; and for the matter of that, what are you doing here? What reason had you for killing Black Eagle the way you did, and he without even a hatchet to defend himself? You can't put that wicked, cold-blooded murder onto me by lying, any more than you can fly. What's more, you can't scare me by saying you'll swear I killed the Indian! So I tell you right here, Mr. Duff, that I want no more to do with you. You guessed right in thinking I came here to bury all that's left of Ichabod Nesbit. It is because my partner and I have civilized feelings. Anything else you want to know you can ask about at the next house. What was Ichabod Nesbit to you, anyway? If you ever had any

friendship for him, why shouldn't you turn in here and help with his grave?"

With such rapidity did John speak, his voice growing in vehemence as he continued, that Duff was bothered to find an immediate answer.

"Didn't you see no Quaker feller 'round here, an' ain't he got no letter like Duff said?" squeaked Dexter, over Duff's shoulder, in his peculiar gasping tones.

"Shut up, you!" commanded Duff, turning to his companion savagely. "Who said anything about a Quaker?" And then to John in the same tones: "Now we have no time for foolishness, bub! We want information and, by heaven, we propose to have it!"

As he spoke the hideous fellow leaped toward the boy as though to seize him.

"Stand back there!" the lad cried, clubbing his rifle, unwilling to shoot, much as he was inclined to do so, unless it were absolutely necessary.

"Grab him! Grab him, you blasted fools!" yelled Duff furiously, and Dexter and Quilling,

who ran to their leader's side, attempted to do so.

Dodging the fellows, John dealt a stunning blow on Duff's head with the butt of his rifle, then, springing to one side, escaped the terrific lunge the brute made toward him, and in another second he had leaped upon Neb's back, Dexter and Quilling being not five yards away. He seized the reins from the branch over which they were thrown, and a word was enough to set the horse off at a gallop.

A bullet whistled over John's shoulder as he bent down to avoid the low limbs of the trees, and the terrible tones of Duff, as in the vilest language he cursed his companions for being too slow, rang in his ears.

One other shot was fired but it went wide. For five minutes he gave Neb free rein, then knowing that he was, for the time being, safe, he stopped, nervous and excited, and doubting if his conduct had been either brave or wise.

"But it was three against one and those fellows would have tried to make me tell all I

- know about that letter, and Duff's temper is so awful! He would have killed me, like as not, if I would not tell him anything," John reasoned, persuading himself that he had done well to escape.

What was next to be done? That was the all-important question, after all. Its answer, John decided, depended entirely on what Duff and his agreeable companions meant to do, and he resolved to ascertain their intentions.

Without further loss of time, therefore, the boy fastened Neb's reins to a branch as he had done before, and with great caution hurried back along the trail. If he were being followed, he could soon find it out. If the murderers were gone, he might return and complete the task he had set out to perform.

Expecting to see Duff and the others coming toward him at any moment, John made haste slowly, and half an hour passed before he again came within sight of the little valley where the day's terrible tragedy had been enacted. The three men were not there.

Where were they? To answer the question, the young man who asked it of himself continued on, going in the direction in which Quilling and Dexter had disappeared just after the murder of Black Eagle.

"They may have a camp near by," John told himself as he hurried along, quietly as possible, though the leaves under his feet seemed to rustle loudly as though calling out that he was coming, adding to his fears.

But he was right. Not much more than a quarter of a mile away was a great tree, uprooted by the wind; and partially concealed by the branches of its top upon the ground, he discovered Duff, Dexter and Quilling. They were for the most part hidden by the limbs of the fallen oak and, had not John been very watchful he would not have discovered them without being seen himself. As it was, he doubted his ability to approach nearer without revealing his presence to the fellows. That they were talking he knew by their gestures, but not a word could he hear.

Prudence prompted the boy to turn back and hurry home to tell Ree everything that had happened. Then he thought how anxious his chum would be to know what Duff's plans were; and so, yielding to his own curiosity and a desire to obtain this information, he made a wide half-circle and approached the fallen tree, shielded from view by the mass of earth still clinging to its upturned roots. These very roots, however, which served him so well for the one purpose, entirely prevented his hearing what was being said by the men, though he was now quite near. With great care, then, he crept around to the trunk of the tree and keeping close beside it, on his hands and knees crawled forward. Now he could hear the conversation of the fellows, and under the protection of a great limb which projected from the trunk fifty feet from the tree's base, he paused.

"It don't noway stand to reason that the Quaker ain't got the letter."

John knew that it was Dexter who was talk-

ing, though he could not see. The wheezy voice could be no other's.

"But where is he? That's the point I'm getting at. We could fix him in short order, if we only knew that."

These words, sharply spoken, were surely Duff's.

"All I've got to say is, that I wish I was to home—I do, by gum!"

This was the landlord, tired, probably, of sleeping out at night, and working and walking by day. John knew his voice, also.

"I wish to goodness you were!" came the voice of Duff, disgustedly, "but all the miserable, sneaking robbing of travelers' clothes at night, that you ever did wouldn't be a drop in the bucket beside this buried fortune if we can only get hold of it. No man knows better than me what a lot of wealth that chest has in it—unless it be that Quaker, blast him!"

"Well, we might go back to Fort Pitt for a spell, anyhow, an' rest up," suggested Quiling.

"Not by a jugful!" Duff answered. "We'll follow those blasted youngsters up, and find out what they know. Like as not they, and not the Quaker, have got that letter. They're a blamed sight sharper than you give 'em credit for, and the next time you let one of 'em get away from you, I'll boot you seven ways for Sunday, see if I don't!"

Duff's tones were full of emphasis, and it was all very interesting to the boy concealed behind the tree trunk and the giant limb. But he heard no more; for with, "So, now, stir yourselves," the chief of the conspirators walked out from the tree-top. He went toward a small beech in which John now noticed that the quarters of a deer had been hung, beyond the reach of wolves.

The fellow's course took him within a few yards of the hidden boy, but he passed on, unconscious of the eyes which watched him.

Knowing that in returning to the camp with the deer Duff would be almost certain to see him, John waited only till the man's back was toward him, then leaped to his feet and ran.

CHAPTER X.

THE QUAKER'S STORY.

Now it happened that Hank Quilling, the tavern keeper, was gazing straight toward the spot where John was concealed at the moment the boy sprang up, as if out of the earth. The surprise that the fellow suffered as he saw the lad so upset him that he could do nothing but yell, and yell lustily he did:

“There he goes, Duff! There he goes! Stop him, Duff, stop him!”

Duff, likewise taken by surprise, and being under the impression at first, as he heard the leaves rustle under the flying boy's feet, and saw a shadow streaking among the trees, that an Indian was after him, was given such a

scare to begin with, and was so chagrined directly afterward, when he discovered what had taken place, that his wrath rose in a mighty storm.

Quilling's yelling at him, instead of pursuing or shooting at the boy himself directed Duff's rage toward the former landlord. Paying no attention to John, he rushed madly up to Quilling. With the most frightful curses he called the old fellow "a driveling idiot" and worse names, and ended by slapping him full in the face.

Even this vile insult, however, served only to make the erstwhile tavern keeper beg the more piteously for mercy, and try the harder to excuse himself to the man he feared. Never was there a more abject coward.

Considerably astonished that he was not pursued, though he heard the epithets Duff rained upon Quilling, John soon slackened his pace to a brisk walk, and looked about to get his bearings. He had lost sight of the trail when approaching the fallen tree, and in his haste to

flee from the spot when discovery was no longer to be escaped, he had run in the wrong direction. The position of the sun, however, and the mossy bark on the north side of the trees, aided him in soon finding the right course, and in due time he reached Neb. Then he remembered that his shovel had been left in the grave intended for Ichabod Nesbit, and rode back for it.

The short afternoon was nearly gone, and it was likely that at any moment Duff and his two choice friends would come upon the scene. Still John resolved to try to complete the work of burying Nesbit's remains. He stooped and picked up the shovel.

Bang—splank! A bullet shattered the handle of the tool and knocked it from the lad's hands. At the same instant he saw Duff and Dexter running toward him, Quilling bringing up the rear.

In a trice John was mounted and away amid the frantic yells of Quilling and the harsh

curses of Duff, and though Dexter took aim at him, he did not fire.

"It's the charm—it's the charm!" cried Quilling tremblingly. "Three times that pesky young rooster has got away from us this day! It's bad luck—bad luck to follow him now!"

John heard the cry as he sped up the hill, but he knew Duff would ignore it, and feeling sure that he would be followed clear to the cabin, sooner or later, he lost no more time in hurrying toward home. He did not even stop in the gully to hitch Neb to the abandoned cart, as he had planned, but hurried by. It was now so late that he would not reach the cabin until after dark at best, and to try to thread the uncertain trail with the cart after darkness came was out of the question, even should he encounter no wolves, which animals were not unlikely to attack him if given half an opportunity after nightfall.

The sparks pouring out of the great chimney of the cabin and the light shining through the chinks here and there, giving promise of a

warm fire and supper awaiting him, were a most pleasant sight to John as he galloped into the clearing and across the little valley to his home, in the early twilight. The night had come on cold and raw, with every indication of a considerable snowfall and an end of the bright days of autumn weather which had extended into December.

Ree came quickly out of the cabin as he heard John's approach.

"Trot along in, old boy, and warm yourself, I'll look after Neb," he said, wondering why John had not brought the old cart home, but waiting for another time to ask questions, for he knew his chum must be cold.

Ah, how pleasant it was to be snug and comfortable and safe once more, and with his mind chuck-full of interesting things to tell Ree, thought John, when he had washed his hands and face and spoken a pleasant word to the quiet Quaker sitting in a big, easy chair the boys had rigged up for him, with the half of a large hollow block of wood for a back. There

was the delicious smell of fresh bear steaks to sharpen his appetite, too, and a crisp, brown johnny-cake still smoking hot on the table. A little bark basket of hickory nuts, to be cracked afterward as a relish and to help pass the time pleasantly, was on the rude chimney mantel. Only one thing marred his happiness. It was the thought of the awful murder of Black Eagle and of the Indian's body lying cold and still in the dark forest.

"Yes, sir, I guess it does feel good to be back again," said John most heartily, in reply to a remark the Quaker made, and soon Ree came in and supper was ready at once.

Theodore Hatch was helped up to the table, easy chair and all, and the two boys seated themselves on three-legged stools, of their own manufacture.

"I've got a heap to tell," said John, brimming over with anxiety to impart his information, but giving Ree a wink to signify that he could not tell all in the presence of the Quaker

without letting the latter know the object of his journey.

“Go ahead; let’s hear the whole story,” said Ree. “Mr. Hatch knows where you went, and why. For, you see, he made a discovery to-day, and then I told him where Ichabod Nesbit was killed, and that you had gone to give his bones a respectable burial.”

The gravity of Ree’s tone caused John to ask, with some concern:

“A discovery?”

“Yes; he was robbed at the Eagle tavern of the half of a letter telling the location of a fortune hidden in the ground somewhere near Philadelphia. Now, don’t open your eyes so. We should have guessed as much after seeing the letter those men, Duff and Dexter, and the landlord, had. The fact is, Mr. Hatch has not told his story more than what I have told you, but waited until you should be here to hear it.”

“But tell thy own story first, friend. Mine can wait,” the Quaker said.

“Well, Black Eagle’s dead, and Duff and

Dexter killed him. I saw Duff shoot him down. They might have killed me, but I got away from them. Quilling, the landlord at the Eagle tavern, is with them, and—”

Really enjoying the sensation he had caused, John paused and looked at Ree, who was staring at him in astonishment, and at the Quaker, who was wringing his hands, greatly distressed, as he always was when he heard of the killing of human beings, or of any act of cruelty.

“The poor Indian! Father in heaven, forgive the slayers of so good a man as Black Eagle!” came prayerfully from the Quaker’s lips.

“Did you know him—Black Eagle, I mean?” asked John in some surprise.

The Quaker nodded, and Ree, recovering from the depths of thought into which his mind had sunk, quickly said:

“Now, John, do tell all that happened! Begin at the time you left here! You saw three fellows and—”

"Just wait a jiffy," John interrupted. "I didn't see those fellows when I left here, any such thing!"

Ree smiled and allowed his friend to begin all over again and tell the story in his own way. This John did to the satisfaction of both his hearers, when once fairly started, and long before he had finished they were forgetting their supper, growing cold before them as they listened.

"Those chaps will be here, sooner or later. We've got to watch out for them," said Ree decisively, when John concluded. "What a horrible fellow that Duff is!"

"Such greed for gold—such greed for gold!" murmured Theodore Hatch sorrowfully. "Better, my dear, kind aunt, hadst thou thrown thy riches and thy jewels to the flames!"

"Does Mr. Hatch know we have the half of the letter which Ichabod Nesbit had?" John asked, in the midst of the questions Ree put to him, and the exclamation of the Quaker.

"I know thou hast the writing, friend. I know that, and promise me that Duff shall never have it!"

The old gentleman's eager earnestness was most intense. As he spoke he rose partially to his feet, leaning heavily on the table. His movement was so sudden, his manner so keenly earnest, that both Ree and John involuntarily started back in surprise, the Quaker bending toward them. As for an instant all paused in these attitudes, the hickory bark torch on the mantel and the blaze of the fire casting a flickering, ruddy glow upon them, a most dramatic picture was presented.

"Sit down, Mr. Hatch," said Ree quietly, hesitating but a moment. "Duff shall not have that portion of the letter which we found. It is your own, and we shall help you to prevent his getting it, if he tries."

"What we want to do," said John bluntly, "is to get hold of the part of the letter that Duff has."

"That depends on what Mr. Hatch says," Ree answered.

"It was my poor, dear aunt's money. It was to be Ichabod's and mine. Now Ichabod's gone, and—"

"All the money is yours," John put in as the Quaker hesitated.

"I wish very much to get it—it is all mine—I wish I could remember the wording of the part of the letter stolen from me. Alas, I cannot—and the half of the writing which Ichabod had, and for which I undertook so much, is now of no use to me. If Mr. Duff comes here, as you say he may, I shall ask him to give me the paper they took from my saddle-bags. I shall insist; for the writing can be of no use to him without that which goes with it."

"Of course not," said John, smiling at the old gentleman's simplicity.

"But tell your story now, Mr. Hatch, if you are not too tired," Ree urged. "Yet you must not over-estimate your strength, you know."

"To be sure," John quickly added, "I've

been wanting for a long time to know about that hidden treasure, and who hid it, and what for. Why, Ree and I talked about it many times, before we knew anything more about it than was in the letter which Nesbit had—”

“It is not much of a story,” said the Quaker sadly, as John left the sentence unfinished, “but I will tell thee all I know and should have told thee long before but wished to be sure that I could trust thee.”

“That was when you thought that your half of the fortune letter was in your saddle-bags,” put in John slyly, while Ree could not but smile at the odd mixture of cupidity and simplicity which Mr. Hatch displayed, and his chum’s gentle insinuation that the Quaker would not trust them until he found his much-prized letter missing.

“Yea, verily, I thought the letter was in my saddle-bags, and watched them so closely, fearing some one would suspect my secret. I could not endure to have them out of my sight, but never once did I doubt that the paper was

safely inside the little pocket I had made for it. And lo, it had been taken out far back at the Eagle tavern! Verily, it is in heaven that we should lay up golden treasure, where moth and rust cannot corrupt. But we must try to obtain the paper which was taken from me; aye, we must not fail to do that! Yet there must be no bloodshed—no fighting!”

Seeing how his chance remark had switched the Quaker from his story, John resolved to interrupt no more, nor did he. Mr. Hatch's mind, however, was apparently so divided between the thought of his loss and the narrative he was trying to relate that his progress was tediously slow. Not once did the boys suspect, however, that he was not telling the absolute truth.

The old gentleman explained to the two friends that when he first discovered that the letter had been removed from his saddle-bags, he suspected them of taking it; but when he had told Ree that the paper was missing and the latter at once remembered the writing in

the hands of Duff, Dexter and Quilling at the Eagle tavern, and the peculiar circumstances connecting Ichabod Nesbit's name with matter, and informed him of this, he knew his young hosts were innocent, and blamed himself harshly for doubting them.

The Quaker's story was a long one, and may be summed up substantially as follows:

He and Ichabod Nesbit, he stated, were half-brothers. Ichabod being the younger by nearly twenty years, there had never been much companionship between them, and they drifted farther and farther apart after the death of their mother. She had been an English girl and her first husband, Mr. Hatch's father, was an Englishman. With the family lived the mother's sister, whom they called "Aunt Harriet." A good many years after Mr. Hatch's father died, his mother had been married a second time to John Nesbit. Of this union Ichabod was born. At the breaking out of the Revolutionary war, Ichabod was a wild, worthless young fellow and left home presum-

ably to become a soldier, and Theodore Hatch, having become a Quaker, meanwhile, remained in Pennsylvania and saw his brother no more.

Time passed and the mother of the two half-brothers died. It then developed that property she had had in her own name had all been spent by her second husband, now deceased, and by Ichabod. But her sister, "Aunt Harriet," was still possessed of means, through fortunate investments in Philadelphia.

However, she was also possessed of a stern, Loyalist spirit, and though she privately admitted that King George III. was a "sap-head," in her own language, she strongly insisted that no matter who or what the king was, his subjects should be loyal. She resolved to return to England, and secretly disposed of her property, though at great sacrifice. She would not, however, take with her to England the wealth she had acquired in the Colonies whose rebel spirit she hated.

What was to be done? She determined to give all that she left behind to her nephews,

Theodore Hatch and Ichabod Nesbit. But as both were absent, she hit upon the plan of hiding her fortune, and then, after writing a careful description of the location of the hiding place, cut the writing in two, sending one-half to one nephew, the other to the other; and sending to each, also, a long letter explaining her plan and urging them to be more brotherly—Ichabod to be a better man and Theodore to be more charitable toward him.

To obtain her fortune they would thus be obliged to meet and put together the two halves of the written description of the spot where the money and valuables were secreted, or they could not find that hiding place. Well pleased with her novel scheme, the old lady bade the half-brothers an affectionate farewell in the letters which she wrote, and at the earliest opportunity departed for England, never to return.

Nearly a year passed, the Quaker stated, before the lawyer to whom the secret letters were entrusted found Theodore Hatch and delivered

his letter to him. The lawyer knew nothing of the letter's contents, and when the Quaker inquired of him concerning Ichabod Nesbit, he could give no information save that Ichabod had been in Philadelphia expecting to find his aunt and get some money; but she was gone, and he got instead the letter left for him.

“You can tell that pious half-brother o’ mine that if he wants to do business with me he can hunt me up. I ain’t goin’ to look fer him.”

This was the message Ichabod left for the Quaker, the latter said, but the lawyer, not knowing what the words meant, gave them no particular thought.

CHAPTER XI.

HELPING THE DELAWARES—DANGER.

“Thus thou knowest that much time passed ere I made any effort to find Ichabod,” the Quaker concluded. “I did at last hear that he was living in Connecticut, and had settled down to peaceable pursuits. So, in the course of time, I set out to find him, and having no family and no kin, save Ichabod, I proposed to give all my time to it. With all my earthly possessions in my saddle-bags, therefore, I mounted my dearly beloved mare and set out. I have been traveling ever since. In time I learned of Ichabod’s death. It was at the Eagle tavern that I heard of it. Friend Quilting there knew of the half-letter which Icha-

bod had, and knew of what I was in search, as soon as I inquired for Brother Nesbit. For Mr. Quilling and Ichabod were very friendly.

"I lodged at the Eagle tavern that night and from there set out to find the Indian, Black Eagle, and in a few weeks I located him. But he had taken nothing from the body of Ichabod Nesbit, for killing whom I took him sharply to task; for, though Ichabod was no credit to me, he was yet my half-brother, as I have said. Having learned from Black Eagle where Ichabod's body lay, beneath the stones along the trail at the foot of the hill, near where a giant tree was shattered by lightning, I went again to the Eagle tavern to get further information.

"I wished to know if Ichabod had any family or other relations of whom I might be ignorant. I found that he had none. And it was that night, as I lay at Mr. Quilling's establishment, that my letter was taken from my saddlebags, though they were in my room, and the greater wonder is that nothing else was stolen.

Not—not that I have anything of great value about me! Indeed, no!”

So did the Quaker finish his story, and neither of the lads who heard it for a moment thought he had not spoken the truth.

“It must have been soon afterward that we chanced to stop at the Eagle,” said Ree, thoughtfully. “Quilling, being somewhat of a coward, and wanting help, took Duff and Dexter into his confidence, hoping to secure the other half of the fortune letter. They found Black Eagle and persuaded him to accompany them into this wilderness to find Nesbit’s body, believing either that they would reach the spot ahead of you, Mr. Hatch, or that you would be unable to find where Nesbit was killed—at any rate, that they would get his half of the letter, and, already having yours, secure the fortune.”

“Nay, they did not know I was coming to these desolate wilds,” the Quaker answered. “Not that I would intentionally deceive—oh, no! but fearing that rough persons along the road might molest me, should my mission be

known, I caused Friend Quilling to believe (without staining my lips with lies, however) that I would be going back to Philadelphia, which I fervently hope I may yet do. But, oh, how sadly disfigured! Yet I shall not appear to disadvantage when my hat is on. That will cover the disfigurement then. No one will know my scalp is gone."

"And when those fellows discovered," said John, "that some one had reached Nesbit's grave ahead of them, and Duff found out that Black Eagle had directed you to the place, saying nothing to them of having done so, he deliberately killed the Indian. Now, what I was going to say is just this:—Duff will kill any one of us if he gets a chance, if he thinks he can get hold of that piece of paper by doing so! What we ought to do is to go straight to those robbers and compel them to give up the letter they stole from Mr. Hatch."

This suggestion gave the Quaker great uneasiness.

"No, no—we must not go near them! We

must keep away from them—oh dear, oh dear!”

All in all Mr. Hatch was so distressed and it was now so late, that without more ado, Ree drew in the latch-string, a signal that it was bed time.

The hickory bark torch had long since burned out. The fire was low and the interior of the cabin almost dark. Confident, therefore, that no one without would notice his action, even though watching the cabin, Ree next opened loop holes on all sides and he and John carefully looked out.

All was still and calm save for the usual sounds of animals in the surrounding forest and the blowing of the wind, swirling fine dry snow, with which the air was filled in all directions, even under the door of the cabin.

“Ring will wake us up if any one comes prowling around the cabin,” said Ree, “and those chaps won’t do more than try to steal that letter. Moreover, they cannot be sure that we have it. They naturally suppose that

Mr. Hatch got it, and it is not likely they are sure he is with us, or that we ever saw him, even. Their scheme will be to spy around and learn all they can before they begin to fight. As for their trying to swear upon us the killing of Black Eagle, I don't fear that a particle."

John acknowledged that Ree's thoughts were probably correct, and neither lad felt any alarm as they went to bed; and as for Theodore Hatch, he was already snoring.

The snow was several inches deep and the air biting cold when the pioneer boys arose in the morning, but they welcomed the change for two reasons: first, it gave them better success in hunting and trapping, by reason of their being able to track the game; and in the second place they would be able, by reason of the snow, speedily to discover the fact if human prowlers were about; for there are times when foot-prints tell as much as words could do.

It was a matter of regret to both the boys, however, now that the hunting was so good,

that they could not go together on account of the necessity of one remaining with Mr. Hatch. The Quaker was well and strong enough that he could have been left alone, but he was so afraid, and there really was such danger that Duff and his party would visit the cabin, that the lads deemed it unwise to take any chances.

The absence of the Indians—the warriors and hunters—was noticeable in the success the young Palefaces had with their traps and shooting; but it was also no less noticeable in the lack of business they had as traders, and to keep their store of furs piling up they hunted a great deal.

It was not an uncommon thing during the fine winter days which followed this first hard snow storm for John to go many miles from home in quest of game, while Ree devoted the day to chopping wood and clearing the land near the cabin, taking his turn at hunting the next day; but neither boy saw anything of Duff, Dexter or Quilling.

Occasionally wandering Indians came to the

cabin, but they reported, when questioned, that they had observed no Paleface strangers anywhere about. So a feeling of greater security from molestation by either white or red men came to the occupants of the little log house beside the river; and about this time, too, a discovery was made which afforded a new subject for thought and conversation.

Ree was hunting one day some distance from home in the direction of the town of the Delawares upon the lake, and came upon the tracks of a young bear, which for some reason had left its winter quarters or had failed to find any. He followed the trail of the cub to a large oak, and discovered the animal quietly resting in a fork of the tree, twenty feet from the ground. At one shot he brought the bear down, and, securing the pelt, it occurred to him to take the best portions of the meat to the Delaware town as a good-will offering to the old men and squaws there. He would inquire what had been heard of Captain Pipe, and might also get news of Duff's party, or of the

lone Indian, who had not been seen for a long time.

Within an hour of the time the thought came to him, Ree was at the Delaware village. He could not but notice how lonely an air it had. Even the dogs seemed not to bark so vigorously as usual, but sniffed hungrily, leaping up at the bear meat upon his shoulder.

“How, neighbors and friends,” called Ree, as the noise of the dogs brought the Indians, Gentle Maiden among the rest, from the cabins, and stepping up to the daughter of Captain Pipe, he said:

“Gentle Maiden, I shot a young bear near by, and I have brought some fresh meat for you and your people, if you care for it; and if you do not, the dogs may be glad of it.”

With a graceful courtesy, which may have been all her own, or taught her, more likely, by the Moravian missionaries, of whom, as a child, she had learned to speak English, the Indian girl accepted the gift, saying most ear-

nestly, as the other Indians, half clad, wrapped in skins and worn blankets, crowded near:

“Truly the Great Spirit has sent you—the Great Spirit of the Red Children of the forests, or the God of the Palefaces—has sent you and this food. For days and nights—more than on the fingers of both my hands could be told—my father’s people have had no meat—only the flesh of the dogs we killed.”

Ree would have interrupted the girl to tell his regret that he and John had not known their needs to have helped them before, but she would not permit it; for Gentle Maiden, now really a young woman, though girlish in appearance in her short skirt and embroidered leggins, continued:

“Very little corn have we left, and of beans none; and no powder here for the one gun left with us by my father’s warriors. Yet come, rest, and eat of what we have and our people shall prepare more.”

Giving the bear meat to some squaws to be quickly cooked, Gentle Maiden and her mother

led the way to the cabin of Captain Pipe, somewhat better than the others, though poor enough and now half filled with smoke from the fire built in the center of the earthen floor, beneath a hole in the roof.

"I had hoped to find Chief Hopocon (Captain Pipe) back from his fighting expedition," said Ree, pretending to eat of the scanty quantity of parched corn placed before him, for hospitality's sake, a courtesy the Indians never forgot.

"No, the fighting may not be over. There may be another great battle," said the girl.

"Another battle?" the boy ejaculated. "Has there been one, then?"

"Has the white brother not heard?—a great battle, in which my father's warriors and many more drove the soldiers of the Long-knives even as scared birds before a mighty storm, and—"

It was in the mind of Gentle Maiden to complete the sentence by saying, "and took many, many scalps," but she wished to spare the white boy's feelings, and hesitated.

"How do you know this?" Ree questioned, quickly guessing the words left unsaid.

"A runner came to tell of the mighty battle and to call all the people to be ready to drive every Paleface from our lands."

"Tell me more of the battle," Ree said, quietly. "Was it long ago? And where was the fighting?"

"There," answered Gentle Maiden in a hushed but still slightly triumphant tone, pointing to the westward, "a journey of seven suns, it may be, near the river called Wabash. The Paleface chief Sain Clair (General St. Clair) and many soldiers had come into the land of my father's people and his friends to build their forts and to drive the Indians from their homes. It was at the coming of day that the battle began and the white soldiers and the warriors were many as the trees of the forest. Hard and long was the fighting, but before the sun was in the middle of the sky our warriors had conquered—our warriors had driven the white chief Sain Clair and all the soldiers from

their camps, and they fled before my father's people even as leaves when the winds blow hard."

"Were many killed?"

Ree asked the question calmly, though he could hardly restrain his feelings or keep from showing the resentment in his heart that the Indian girl should seem to boast of the victory over the white men. And yet he knew that the savages had been abused and imposed upon. He knew that their children were taught to look upon the whites as their enemies and as people of "two tongues," who would deceive and cheat and steal. Especially was this true in this land of the Ohio, where the awful massacre of nearly a hundred peaceable Indians by white soldiers was still fresh in the minds of the savages.

Gentle Maiden did not at once answer the question, for in her heart she felt that Ree, who had been her father's friend, was angered by the news she told him and by her tone.

"Many will rise only in the spirit world,"

she said at last, "many Palefaces and many warriors. Never has my father told me of any battle where the ground was so covered by the killed."

"It is too bad, Gentle Maiden," the white boy returned thoughtfully, and then, thinking suddenly of that unknown, lone Indian of whom he had seen or heard nothing for some time, he remarked:

"Perhaps the Indian who has been fighting the white men alone in these forests here was also in the battle. I have not seen him for a long time."

"He was not in the battle, but a new scalp hangs at his belt."

"Have you seen him? Has he been here?"

"He has not been here. The runner I told you of saw him; and a white hunter lies dead by the stream named the White Woman. It is his own battle the red brother fights, and he will go to war in no other way."

"Who is he, Gentle Maiden?"

“My father, Chief Hopocon, may tell you. He is not of my father’s people.”

Knowing that further questioning would be useless, Ree said no more about that matter, but sought to ascertain to what extent his aid and John’s would be acceptable in furnishing meat for the people still remaining in the Delaware village. He quickly found that, whatever her feelings toward the Palefaces in general might be, the daughter of Captain Pipe looked upon himself and his friend in quite a different way, and she gladly heard his suggestion that, as they killed more game than they needed for themselves, he would see to it that the Delawares should not want.

This suggestion cost Ree considerable discomfort of mind, notwithstanding, and he was by no means certain that John would welcome the proposition after he had heard of the battle of which the girl told (the defeat of St. Clair, Nov. 4, 1791). And indeed it did seem to Ree himself almost unbearable to consider that he and John should be furnishing food to the

helpless members of Captain Pipe's village, while that honest but cruel and defiant chieftain and his braves were making war on the whites—his own people; also that they should be giving assistance to those who upheld the mysterious lone Indian in his secret, sneaking attacks upon solitary hunters and travelers. But he bade Gentle Maiden and the other Indians who came to see him off, a friendly farewell, and set out for home, thinking deeply of all he had heard.

The thought would come to him that he and John were bound to have trouble; for, though they might retain the friendship and good will of Captain Pipe, it was more than probable that he would be unable to restrain his warriors, and especially the warriors of other tribes, the Wyandots, Senecas and, most of all, the Mingoes, from making a bold attack upon them, now that their blood was heated by a deeper hate and their minds inflamed by the victory they had won. So, wearily, Ree plodded through the snow.

CHAPTER XII.

BANDS OF BLACK.

A bitterly cold night was closing in when Ree reached the cabin.

"I rather guess there will be no prowlers around this evening," he remarked, as he shook the snow from his coonskin cap in front of the roaring fireplace, and held his hands to the blaze to warm them.

"Ree," said John, ignoring the remark, "Mr. Hatch wants a feather bed. We were talking about it as you came in. I told him we could make him one from turkey feathers."

"So we can," was the answer. "We'll begin saving feathers right away."

"It is because I have decided to remain here

until I can go in quest of the rascals who have the missing part of my aunt's letter," the Quaker put in, very seriously. "For poor Ichabod is dead—dead and gone—and the money, lads, is mine—all mine. Oh, I must obtain the paper which was stolen from me! All mine—the money and all—it is all mine," he murmured, and from time to time repeated—"All mine—all mine!"

Much thinking of the hidden treasure and his assertion that he was the only creature known to be alive who had any valid claim to the fortune, seemed fast to be making Theodore Hatch a covetous, disagreeable old man. He had changed wonderfully in the short time since the boys had known him.

"Thou shalt stay as long as we do, if thou likest, friend," said Ree, adopting the Quaker manner of speaking. "But the Indians have fought a great battle near the Wabash river and sadly defeated General St. Clair and his troops. What the result will be as concerns ourselves, we must wait and see."

“What’s that?” John exclaimed.

All that he had learned from Gentle Maiden, Ree then told his friends, and he told them also of the destitute circumstances in which he found the people still remaining in Captain Pipe’s village.

There arose in John’s mind at once the same question that had perplexed Ree—should they help these needy Indians, while those who ought to be at home providing for them were fighting the white troops and, no doubt, killing settlers and plundering and burning their cabins?

“After all, we can’t let the poor Redskins starve,” he said at last.

“Just what I said to myself on the way home,” Ree replied.

Theodore Hatch had risen and was walking up and down the one tiny room of the cabin, despondent and deeply sorrowing, as was usual with him when he heard news of bloodshed. He spoke no word, but at last, still deep in thought, laid himself down upon his bed and buried his face in the coarse pillow formed in part by his

closely-watched saddle bags. His position had not changed when the two boys were ready to go to bed, and, thinking he slept, they covered him over with a blanket and bearskin.

All night the wind howled through the valley of the Cuyahoga, bending the strongest limbs of the forest trees and snapping dead branches off short with a sudden crackling which added to the threatening noises all about. All night the snow went flying before the gale, piling itself in drifts upon the log doorstep of the lonely cabin, against every fallen tree and against every rock and bluff for miles around,—in the haunted spot where the sunken eyes of the dead Black Eagle stared upward through their mantle of white, and beside the smoky hut where Gentle Maiden knelt before the fire and besought the Great Spirit to send aid to her father's people.

All night the storm raged and even the dismal voices of the wolves were stilled and they slunk into their cavern homes; so much the safer were the timid deer seeking shelter among the low-

boughed trees of the ravines. All night the troubled Quaker lay face downward upon his bed, his mind struggling between his love for gold and his wish to do right. On their own bed in the corner, Return Kingdom and John Jerome soundly slept or, partially awakened from time to time by the fierceness of the tempest, dreamed the hours away.

The coming of morning showed the hours of darkness to have been very busy ones for the storm king.

"I think we will not be venturing far from the cabin to-day," said John, looking out.

"Lucky there is no need of doing so," Ree answered.

"Dear friends"—it was the Quaker who spoke, and his voice was strangely soft and low, reminding the boys at once of the caressing way in which he always addressed his mare, Phœbe—"whatever the depth of snow or the cold, I am going to the town of the Delawares to carry them whatever food thee will spare me for them."

"Why, you mustn't think of doing so, Mr. Hatch," said Ree. "I do not believe the Indians are really suffering, as yet."

"They need food, and more than food for their bodies merely," was the answer. "They are but ignorant savages, but bravely they are bearing all the suffering which comes to them because their strong men have gone forth to fight for what they righteously believe to be their own; and I shall go among them, and even as our illustrious William Penn would do were he alive and here, I shall both feed and teach them."

Some great change had come over Theodore Hatch. But the day before he would have shown but little interest in any subject save that of the hidden fortune. Now he did not mention it, but bundled up and visited the log stable adjoining the cabin to tell Phœbe his plans, as he had so often told the gentle animal of the treasure, saying over and over again, "All mine—all mine."

The depth of the snow was so great and the

way so difficult that, finding the Quaker determined to follow out the plan he had formed, the two boys agreed that Ree should accompany him, mounted on Neb, while Mr. Hatch rode his own horse. With a generous supply of provisions, therefore, the two set out, leaving John alone to guard the cabin and the Quaker's prized saddle bags, and to cut and store near the house a stock of wood for the fireplace.

Well-nigh buried beneath the snow, Ree and his companion found the village of the Delawares a desolate place indeed, upon their arrival there after nearly three hours of floundering through great drifts and over fallen trees and brush, the trail being so hidden by its spotless cloak that to follow it closely was quite impossible.

The meat the white men carried to the Indians, however, was really badly needed. It became evident at once that the whole truth had not been revealed to Ree by Gentle Maiden—because of her pride, perhaps—and several of the oldest and most feeble of the Indian men

and women were genuinely sick solely for want of food. The children, too, though bearing their suffering with true Indian grit,—not a cry or whimper escaping them,—were most desperately hungry.

“Our dogs knew our distress and their danger, and our women could not come near to them to kill one for eating. Always did they run away, howling or sometimes almost speaking words of fear—or—or woe,” said Gentle Maiden, telling of the suffering of her father’s people, while Ree and Mr. Hatch warmed themselves at the fire in the chief’s cabin. At the same time the girl’s mother was carrying more wood to make a brighter blaze, and the hungry Delawares were feeding themselves ravenously in their own cabins or beside a fire built near the center of the space the irregular collection of huts enclosed.

“Thy father will not travel far through snow so deep,” the Quaker said in answer. “He and his fighting men will be slow in reaching home, therefore. Yet, young friend, I shall come

among thee with food for thee and thine until he shall return. Is it true that thou wert taught by the Moravian preachers, my dear?"

"The missionaries trained my tongue to speak the language of the Palefaces. They were very kind. Still their God is not the god of the Indians, my father says. My father has lived long. He knows much."

The quick intuition of the girl in recognizing the Quaker as one who would wish to teach the Delawares the religion of the white people, and her way of telling him that his efforts would meet with poor appreciation, amused Ree, though he sincerely wished his friend all success.

"Dear child, thy Father in heaven is all wise and approves the love thou bearest thy earthly father. Goodness is in thy heart, and—see, though one of thy own people, it may be, has done this, yet do I come to thee as a friend who seeks only to do thee good."

As he spoke, the Quaker bent down and pointed to the scalpless top of his head. With

scarcely a tremor Gentle Maiden followed his words and action and realized at once what he had undergone.

"Yea, verily, my head was cut thus, and I was left for dead, but forgiveness is in my heart," the Quaker said.

"My father's people did not that," said the girl, with somewhat of haughtiness in her voice. "The Paleface brother was shot by one who roams far and alone. He is not of my father's tribe. His war is his own war. He comes and goes—now here—now far—much far off. On his arm he marks with paint one band of black for every Paleface killed. Many bands are on his arm. Many Palefaces he has killed. Never will his war be ended. He must not know my Paleface preacher brother, that he thinks he killed, still lives. Yet it is his war. Gentle Maiden may not speak more."

Theodore Hatch was considerably puzzled by the girl's speech; but Ree, quickly understanding her, explained to him that for each person he killed the prowling Indian, whoever he might

be, pricked in black a circlet about his arm, in addition to taking the scalp; that for some reason he would never cease his attacks upon the whites, and that if he discovered that one man, whom he supposed he had killed, was still alive, he would seek to make that man's death certain, or kill some other man instead.

"The young Paleface speaks well. Gentle Maiden cannot tell so many words of English now as when her tongue was trained to speak them," the Indian girl said, confirming Ree's explanation of her warning to the Quaker.

"I shall see him and reason with him. It is wrong that his heart should be set against all white people, though many may have misused him. Where shall I find him?"

"He comes and goes. He is not of the Delawares. His war is his own war. I have spoken," the girl made answer.

"I tried to have Gentle Maiden tell me of this lone Indian myself, but the Delawares will not say who he is," said Ree, fearing the Quaker might give offense by pressing the maiden to

tell more than she was willing to do. "He is not a Delaware, yet Captain Pipe believes he has some just cause for making war on the whites, secretly and alone, and does not attempt to stop him. Am I right, Gentle Maiden?"

The Indian girl nodded her head and said simply, "Yes."

The conversation turned to other subjects, both Mr. Hatch and Ree being anxious to learn to what extent the people of the village would need assistance during the winter, in case Captain Pipe should not return. It quickly became apparent that the Indians would require a great deal of aid. They had almost nothing left to eat, and every cache (holes in the earth in which corn or other provisions were hidden) had been emptied.

The prospect that on the white neighbors of the savages would fall the task of providing them with meat was not, to Ree, a pleasing one. True, it was a duty and must be performed, but it would take the time of himself or John the greater part of every day, he quickly saw. The

Quaker was undoubtedly willing to do his part, but his mind was bent more upon the spiritual than the bodily welfare of the Indians, and, moreover, he would scarcely shoot a deer even if he had an opportunity.

Promising to return in a day or two, Ree and Mr. Hatch took their leave, mounted their horses and started homeward. The wind was still blowing in sudden gusts and was bitterly cold. The trail through the snow, made in reaching the Indian town, however, rendered the return journey easier, and good progress was being made when, as the two rode along the edge of a high bluff between the village and their cabin, a strong wind caught the broad brim of the Quaker's hat and sent it sailing over the edge of the steep hillside, into the gully.

"I'll get it for you," said Ree, who was considerably in advance of his companion, and, reaching a place where the descent was less precipitous, he rode into the ravine, then back

to a point even with that where Mr. Hatch had paused.

An odd picture the Quaker presented as he sat astride his mare, leaning slightly forward, his uncovered, scalpless head exposed to the wind, while he held out his arm pointing to the spot where his beaver lay.

Ree glanced up to note the direction which the outstretched finger indicated. Almost at the same moment a terrific shriek sounded high and loud above the roaring wind, followed by another and another.

In an instant Ree's rifle was at his shoulder. No sign of any living creature could be seen, however, save Theodore Hatch sitting bolt upright in his saddle staring in vacant astonishment across the ravine.

"For goodness sake, what is it?" eagerly cried the boy.

"Verily, I think it was the young Indian who tried to kill me—who has my scalp," muttered Mr. Hatch, in tones of awe.

With all haste Ree recovered the Quaker's

hat and made speed to reach his side. But the Indian had vanished.

"He went so very suddenly I scarcely saw him," the Quaker explained. "I only heard him scream."

The meaning of it all came to Ree's mind like a flash. The lone Indian, prowling along the opposite side of the ravine, had been attracted by the noise of their horses, and slipped up to find what was to be seen. He had come just in time to discover the Quaker in a ghost-like attitude, pointing into the valley meaningly, while his scalped crown and rigid quiet added to the supernatural appearance he made. Recognizing the horse and the rider, the latter a man whose scalp was even then fastened to his own belt, the Indian had been terrified beyond measure—thinking he saw a ghost—the ghost of one of his victims.

"I shall be greatly mistaken if he does not follow us to find out just exactly what he did see," said Ree, explaining his supposition concerning the Indian's fright. "There is no doubt

but what he is watching from a distance at this very minute."

And Ree was right. The lone Indian did follow at a respectful distance, and the fact that he did so was a fortunate thing for the young pioneers, as they afterward discovered.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRY FROM THE DARKNESS.

"I'm mighty glad you're home," was John's greeting as Ree and Mr. Hatch dismounted before the door. "There has been somebody prowling around the woods across the clearing, and it worried me. Honest truth, I believe it was that man Duff, though he looked like an Indian."

"It was an Indian, all right," Ree confidently answered, "our old friend, the vanisher. We, also, saw him, or rather, heard him, and I guess he was more scared than we were, wasn't he, Mr. Hatch?"

"Verily, I was much frightened myself," the

Quaker answered, and then Ree told all about the experience beside the ravine.

John could not be certain that the person he had seen was not the lone Indian. It was during the afternoon, he said, that he noticed a movement among the bushes on the hillside across the clearing, and watching more closely, had made certain that some one was spying on him and the cabin.

“It made me so nervous that I got to thinking maybe some one was slipping up behind me, or maybe some one would get into the shanty while my back was turned, and all of a sudden I found myself as scared as I could be, and I jumped into the house and shut the door, almost sure that I was going to be killed the very next second. Ring clawed at the door a full minute before I could gather up my courage, and laughing because I felt myself so frightened, opened the door for him to come in.”

“It was your imagination that got away with you,” said Ree, smiling. “If a chap just imagines that some one is watching him, waiting to

shoot or grab him, he can scare himself worse than he would be if he really saw some one just ready to jump onto him."

The conversation turned to other subjects then, the boys having agreed that as the wind and snow would by this time have covered up the tracks the prowler made, it would be of no use to try to find them and so determine who the fellow was. It was already dark, moreover, and so stormy a night that neither boy cared to leave the bright fireplace unless it were necessary.

Supper was over and Ree and John and Mr. Hatch, snug and comfortable, were discussing the situation of the Delawares when to their astonishment there came a knocking at the door. In all the time since the cabin was built no visitor had announced his presence in that way.

"Great guns! Who can it be?" murmured John, but Ree hastily arose to answer the call.

"Come in, come in," came the latter's voice cheerily, as the figure of a man crouching close to the wall, as if to escape the raw, cold wind,

was revealed by the firelight when the door was opened.

Softly the person glided into the room and close to the fire, spreading out his hands to the welcome heat, but turning his face away as if the bright glare hurt his eyes. His dress and long black hair and tawny skin indicated that he was an Indian, probably of the Mohawk tribe—a Mingo, at least—but neither of the boys remembered having seen him before.

"It is a cold night," said John, hospitably moving back from the fire to give the visitor more room.

"Ugh!"

The stranger uttered no other word, but, Indian fashion, shrugged his shoulders as if to answer that there was no doubt as to the truth of the remark.

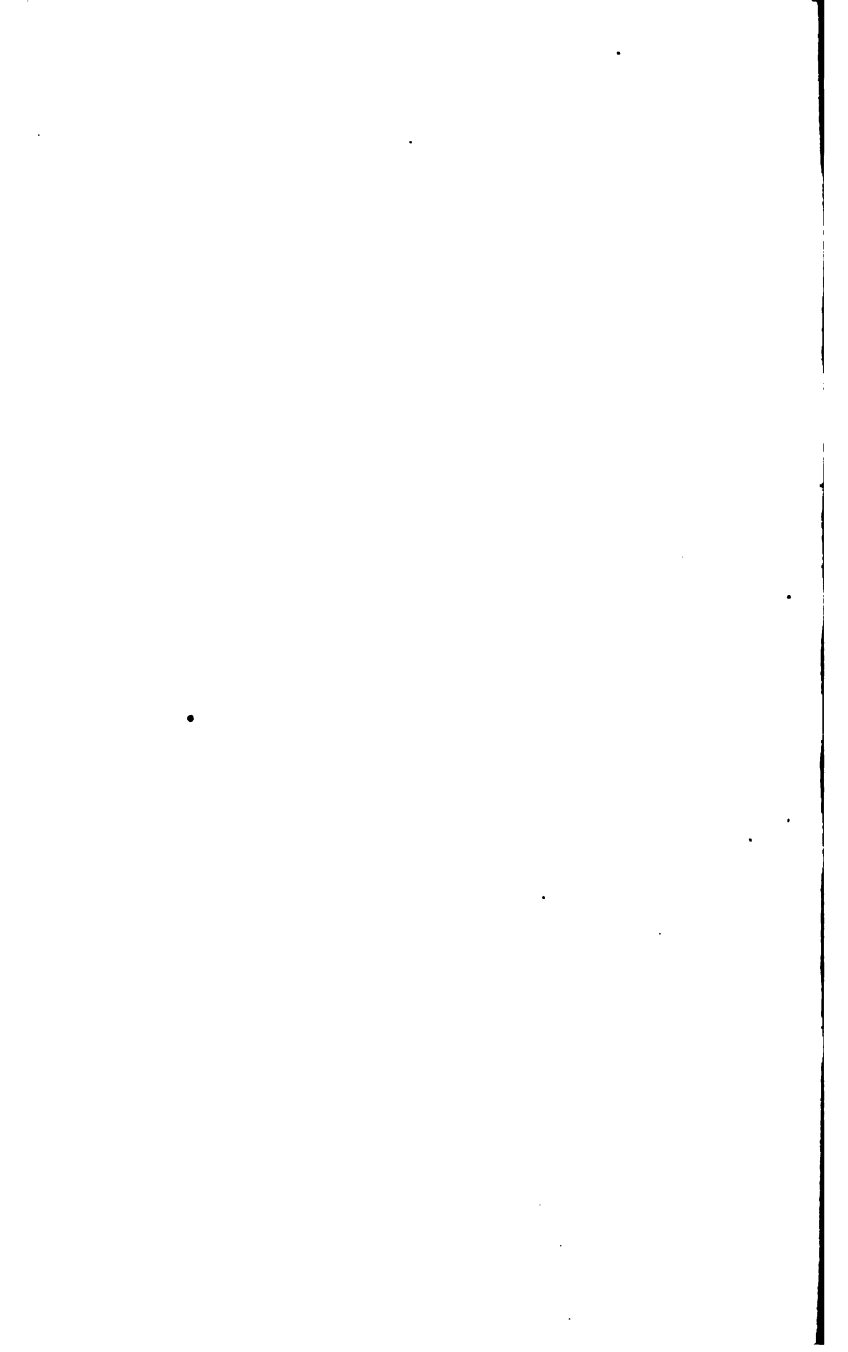
"Have you traveled far?" John asked.

"Heap," the fellow answered, glancing around to note where Ree was placing the rifle he had put in the boy's hands as a sign of friendship, upon entering.



"Gentle Maiden, I shot a young bear nearby, and I have brought some fresh meat for you and your people"

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"Get our friend some meat, John," said Ree, standing the rifle in a corner. "Sit down and warm yourself," he next said, addressing the mysterious caller, pushing a stool toward him.

The fellow seated himself, but still turned his face away, even while eating the cold venison which John placed on another stool beside him. Again John tried to get him to talk, but he answered only in the briefest way, and said nothing except when directly spoken to. Of his own accord a little later, however, he did speak, saying: "Me good Injun; me sleep here," pointing to the floor near the fire.

"Yes, you may sleep there," said Ree, but behind the visitor's back he gave John a look which said, "We must watch this chap," and his chum winked and nodded.

Theodore Hatch seemed quite undisturbed by the presence of the unexpected guest, but continued to talk to the boys of his plans for teaching and caring for the Indians at Captain Pipe's town. Then he drifted from that subject to wondering whether the missing part of

the paper describing the hiding place of his aunt's fortune would ever fall into his hands.

"Of one thing we must make sure," he said, "the letter must never come into the possession of the scoundrels who robbed me. I shall never use—verily if I am to work as a missionary among these poor Indians,—I shall never need, the money my poor mother's sister secreted for my unfortunate brother and myself; yet shall it remain hidden rather than that it should be found and gambled away and spent for rum by the wicked men who have tried to obtain it."

"Heap tired—Injun heap tired," said the strange creature still toasting his hands close to the fire, though it was now so warm that the others had moved back from the blaze, and John was even lying on the bed of skins and blankets in the farthest corner.

"Yes, strange friend, lie down and rest thyself," answered the Quaker complacently, taking a large bearskin from his own bed, and handing it to the fellow.

Without a word the latter wrapped the robe

about his head and shoulders and threw himself in a corner—the very corner in which Ree had put his rifle.

“I, too, am weary,” said Mr. Hatch, and removing his coat and boots he lay down on his own bed and was soon snoring.

Still Ree sat thinking, and John hummed a tune softly to himself as he lay restfully on his back, carelessly wondering whether their visitor spoke the truth when he said, “Me good Injun.” All the fear he had felt during the afternoon was forgotten. As usual he was trusting to Ree to see that precautions were taken and that no harm came to them. In the corner the man under the bearskin seemed sound asleep.

“What was that?”

Ree and John leaped to their feet together. Sharp and clear above the rattle and roar of the nightwind came the report of a rifle, fired at no great distance.

“No, no! Don’t open the door!” John called,

as his more fearless chum sprang forward to look out.

The words came too late. In a trice Ree had the door swung wide and was peering into the gloom, shading his eyes with his hands.

"Help! Help!"

It was the voice of a white man, borne on the wind clearly and distinctly, out of the darkness from the edge of the forest.

"Who—who-o-o!—who-o who-oo!"

As if a giant owl were calling from the blackness of the storm, came these further cries, but in the sounds there was something strangely like a human voice.

"For mercy's sake, Ree, don't stand in the open door that way! You'll be killed," cried John, drawing his friend away.

"Who are you? This way—this way!"

These were Ree's words and he yelled them at the top of his voice.

"Get your gun, John, we must find out who that is," he hurriedly said.

Even as he spoke, and before John could

close the door, a heavy figure leaped between them from behind, dodged sidewise out of the light, and in a moment vanished. It was the mysterious visitor.

"Halt, there! Stand, or I'll put a bullet through you!"

It was Ree who called, but he spoke too late. His words received not the slightest attention, and in another second John succeeded in slamming the door tightly shut, while Theodore Hatch, awake but decidedly bewildered, sat up in bed and stared vacantly.

"What does it mean?"

John dropped almost helplessly upon a stool, completely mystified and not a little alarmed.

"We will have to find out," said Ree, his lips compressed in determination. "Do you want to go out with me to look around?"

"Well, now, look a-here, Ree, we better see what we can make of this business before ever you put your foot out of the door! It looks a lot to me as though some one had set a trap for us. That owl's hooting was a man's voice as

plain as anything I ever heard. And that chap who was in here may have been an Indian, but he was not a 'good Injun,' as he said, by a long sight; so be reasonable."

"Which means be careful," Ree smiled, examining his rifle and slipping a pistol into his belt. "It is a mighty queer affair, and the meaning of it is what I want to find out."

"Verily, I believe it means robbery," spoke up Theodore Hatch, tenderly rubbing the scalpless crown of his head, as if that would help him to recollect his scattered thoughts. "The Indian tried to seize my saddle bags from under my head, before he jumped through the door. I had just wakened up, and scarcely knowing what I was doing, I let fly my fist at him and struck him quite a severe blow, I fear, just below the ear. I think—"

"Duff!" interrupted Return Kingdom, and into the one word he put so much force and expression that it spoke volumes.

"Honest truth, Ree, that was what I thought from the first, but I could not understand how

he could disguise himself so well. He kept his face away from me, but I had one good look at him. The paint must have hid his smallpox marks."

"I was about to say that I think—and hope, indeed, that he was not much hurt," the Quaker went on, just a little impatient that he had been interrupted.

"It was that fellow Duff, beyond a doubt," said Ree. "He expected to get your saddle bags, thinking he would find the half of the cut-in-two letter in them. Somehow or other his game was spoiled. Those cries of help were genuine—no shamming about them!"

"What in the world did that hooting like an owl mean then?" demanded John. "I think the game was that Dexter or that miserable Quilling or both of them were stationed outside to fire a gun and attract our attention. Duff believed that we would then run out to see what was wrong, and he, having got inside by playing the Indian, would then get that letter."

"Well, you were right, old boy, in one thing,

and that is that there is no reason why we should go out and hunt them up to-night. We will just stay quietly inside and one of us must keep an eye open for their coming back. My, how the wind howls! I really pity those poor chaps, that they are out in it."

"Pity your grandmother!" ejaculated John.

"What a world of wickedness it is," sighed Theodore Hatch, dolefully shaking his head and rubbing his hands.

"You and John go to sleep now, Mr. Hatch. There will be no further trouble, I guess," Ree said to the old man kindly, after some further talk, and as the Quaker did lie down, John stretched himself on his own bed, having first buckled on a pistol and placed his rifle within reach.

The exciting incident gave Ree plenty to think about as he gazed keenly through a loop hole, vainly trying to catch sight of some spark of fire or other sign which would show him the whereabouts of the men who had so unexpectedly appeared in the vicinity. The snow-filled

air and thick darkness prevented his seeing anything, however, and the shrieking wind was the only sound which came to him.

John fell asleep at last and Ree did not disturb him until at the first peep of daylight when he went into the shed to care for the two horses, first calling to his chum to get breakfast started.

The wind had gone down with the coming of dawn, but the snow was deep in all directions and the weather was more intensely cold than on the previous day. This, however, did not deter the young pioneers from starting out on a short tour of investigation as soon as the morning meal was over. And Theodore Hatch cautioned them as they set out to use gentle means rather than force, with any one they met.

Not a trace of the footprints of the mysterious visitor of the night before were to be seen. The wind and snow had covered the tracks completely. With the spirit of true woodsmen, notwithstanding, the lads made for that point at the edge of the timber from which they believed

the call for help had come. Even in the woods they found nothing. The snow was over their knees on a level and in many places the drifts were almost impassable.

"It is no use floundering around this way. Let's go home and get our snowshoes," Ree suggested, and John needed no urging. They turned and passed out of the edge of the woods a little to the right of the point at which they had entered. A hundred feet from the timber Ree paused.

"I thought I struck my foot against something—something like the body of a bear, or a wolf, maybe," he said.

"Froze to death," John, who was a few yards in advance, answered carelessly, not looking back, thinking it must be some sick or wounded wolf that had perished in the storm.

"Murdered, is more like it!"

Ree's voice was not raised above his ordinary tone, but the deep significance of his remark caused his companion to turn quickly around. The next instant he was ploughing through the

drifts at a run to where Ree stood, bending over something in the snow.

It was the body of Quilling, late landlord of the Eagle tavern. In his still open eyes was a look of abject terror, and a cry of pain and fear seemed to have stopped half uttered on his lips. From his head the scalp was missing, and where his hat still lay, and under the body, the snow was red with blood.

The crimson stain upon his clothing near the left shoulder told the manner of his death. A bullet had found his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTURED.

"I'll bet I can tell whose work this is!"

In an awed, half-frightened tone, as he looked upon the terrible scene, John spoke.

Ree was already on his knees in the snow trying to learn if there was not some spark of life remaining. There was none. The body was cold and in places the flesh was frozen hard.

"The lone Indian's," he slowly answered John's remark. "Poor Quilling. The only wonder is that the wolves have not been here before us. It was Quilling who cried out for help, last night, John."

"I suppose we will never know just what did happen, but it looks more and more as if a trap

of some kind had been laid for us, now doesn't it? And while Quilling and Dexter waited, perhaps, that prowling Redskin shot him. I only wish it had been Duff who was killed."

As though they had talked the matter all over and agreed what they should do, though scarcely a word was spoken, the boys tramped up the hill to their cabin. With an axe and shovel they returned to where the body of Quilling lay. At the foot of a beech tree which they proposed to save, as the clearing of their land progressed, they laboriously dug a shallow grave.

"I would rather Mr. Hatch should know nothing about this, he is always so broken up by such things," Ree said thoughtfully, as he leaned on his shovel, "but it does seem a pity to bury the poor fellow without a prayer or anything. Shall we tell the Quaker?"

A suggestion from Ree was sufficient always, for John. Theodore Hatch was informed of what had taken place. With tears in his eyes

he repeated a few solemn words of the scriptures and bowed his head in silent prayer.

Deeply impressed, and on the verge of breaking out in sobs, though this man whose clay they buried, that wild animals might not tear the body to pieces, had been their enemy, the brave boys who performed for him the last deed of kindness they could upon this earth, filled in the frozen mold around and above the corpse. So passed from the sight of men, far in the forest's fastnesses, all that was mortal of Henry Quilling, and the ploughshares of later days have long since mingled his dust with the soil.

"It is another warning to us to watch out for that sneaking savage," John remarked for the fourth or fifth time as the three returned slowly to the cabin.

"We must not forget our Delaware friends," spoke Ree more briskly, hoping to turn the thoughts of the Quaker in a new channel; for the old gentleman was deeply depressed by what had occurred. "Do you think we better pay them another visit to-day, Mr. Hatch?"

"Verily, it is a sad business," said the Quaker, "but our first duty always must be to the living. Yea, we must go to the Delawares."

So it was agreed, John. however, taking Ree's place in the journey.

The Quaker and Ree had had trouble, indeed, the day before, in getting through the drifted snow to the Delaware town, but he and John had still more difficulty this day, for the snow was deeper and the great banks were in many places breast high against their horses. And such was the old gentleman's solicitude for his mare that, as they toiled slowly along, he more than once would have turned back, had not the dapple-gray shown a perfect willingness to bear him through the very deepest drifts to the best of its ability. John, mounted on Neb, fell behind, and let the Quaker's horse break the path.

"It is not the difference in the strength, but in the intelligence of the beasts," was the comment Mr. Hatch made. "Thy horse is stronger than my own, but Phœbe understands precisely

what is desired of her—sweet Phœbe,” and he patted the mare’s shoulder lovingly.

The Indian town was reached at last and John shook hands with Gentle Maiden cordially as though she were an old and very dear friend. She had not seen him for long and though, according to the Indian custom, she showed no surprise or especial pleasure at the meeting, it was easily seen that she was pleased.

Still, when the girl engaged in conversation with the Quaker, John left them and picked his way through the snow to different huts of the village, rallying the boys and girls with a smile and a pleasant word and giving even the old squaws to understand that he felt perfectly at home among them. Seeing a bow and arrows hanging on a forked pole in one of the bark cabins, John took them down and called to an Indian lad, ten or twelve years of age, to show him how well he could shoot. The bow was about four and a half feet in length, and made of seasoned hickory, about an inch in thickness at the middle and a quarter of an inch or less,

the narrow way, near the ends. About the parts where the greatest strain came on the bow at either side of the center, the wood was tightly wound with strong strips of deer or some other skin.

John had often seen the bows and arrows of the Indians, though most of the savages were now supplied with firearms, but he examined this bow very carefully. The arrows, too, he looked at with critical eyes, really surprised to note how cleverly they were made. The shaft of each was light but strong and straight, nearly, if not quite, three feet in length. In the larger and heavier end, arrow heads, or points, of varying size, laboriously chipped out in flint, were fastened by splitting the shaft and binding the flint tightly in the opening so made with fine, strong cords of rawhide. Similarly a feather, or in some cases two or three feathers, were fastened at the small end of the shaft to make the arrow fly true to the archer's aim. The bow and especially the arrows, with their sharp, heavy points, were such dangerous looking

weapons that John inquired of the Indian boy, partly in Delaware, partly in English:

“Can you not kill turkeys or deer with the bow, since your warriors are away and your people have no meat?”

“No shoot bows more—shoot guns,” the lad said.

“Yes, I know,” John answered, “but when you have no guns, why not use the bow?”

“Little Wolf, he shoot bow—heap good,” said the Indian lad, whose own name, John afterward discovered, was Flying Fish.

“Let’s see him shoot,” the white boy replied, and Little Wolf, who was even then peeking in at the door of the hut, while he held a bearskin about him for warmth, quickly disappeared. In a half minute, however, he returned bringing, as John correctly guessed, his own bow and arrows. They were like those Flying Fish had, only quite elaborately ornamented with colors dyed in the wood, showing that Little Wolf had much pride in the weapons.

Without a word the lad, who was of about the

same age as the other Indian boy, laid off the bearskin he wore, leaving his shoulders bare to the biting cold. (His lower limbs and waist were clothed in leggins and trousers.) He threw back his head, shaking his long hair away from his face and eyes, and while John intently watched him, pointed to a leaf on the outermost branch of an oak tree, fifty feet or more from the ground and as many yards from where he stood. With careful aim he drew the string and bent the bow, which, being very stiff and strong, required much strength.

For a second he paused as the tip of the arrow rested on the bow-center, then suddenly sent the shaft flying so quickly and swiftly that the white boy nearly missed seeing it. Straight and true the arrow sped, piercing the leaf on the bough of the oak and carrying it off as neatly as if it had been plucked by hand.

In genuine astonishment and admiration, John gave his leg a vigorous slap, and diving his hand into his pocket found a small bone comb which he presented to Little Wolf then

and there; and to prevent hard feelings he gave Flying Fish a similar present.

So pleased were the Indian lads and so friendly after receiving these gifts, that it occurred to John to improve the opportunity to see what he could learn from them about the prowling Redskin who seemed ever to seek and lose no chance to kill and scalp white hunters, always traveling alone, and, as Gentle Maiden had said, carrying on "his own war."

"Killdeer, young Long-knife says," Flying Fish explained to Little Wolf, who seemed not to understand at once to whom the white boy referred.

"Is that his name? He is not a Delaware, is he? He is not one of Captain Pipe's people?" John asked.

"Killdeer, he comes quick—like wind; gone—like wind. No one see him."

And hard as John tried to draw further information about the mysterious Indian from the savage youths, he could learn nothing addi-

tional. They gave evasive answers or failed, or pretended to fail, to understand him.

Half inclined to be cross at the youngsters, though they amused him not a little, John changed the subject and made the boys promise to hunt with bows and arrows and to bring peltries to the cabin to exchange for knives and trinkets.

His chief object in this was to persuade the lads to do some hunting and thus provide food for themselves and others of the Delaware town; and even had he thought of the future, he could not have known, as none can tell what even the next day or hour will bring forth, what an important part Flying Fish and Little Wolf would play in connection with his own well-being, as a result of his kindly interest in them. For as it afterward happened it was solely because of their having been instigated to go in quest of game with only such weapons as they possessed, that they made their appearance at a distant point one day when their young white friend greatly needed them.

Gentle Maiden and the Quaker had finished the distribution of dried venison brought from the cabin by the time John had concluded his talk with the two Indian lads and others who clustered around to see and to hear, and as an early homeward start was desirable, John suggested to Mr. Hatch that they would better be going.

No word had yet been received at the Delaware town from Captain Pipe and there was no knowing when he would be home. However, provisions sufficient to last the Indians three or four days had now been furnished them, and there would be no necessity of visiting the town so soon again. Yet the Quaker, whose whole heart was in this work of teaching and caring for the Indians, which he had taken upon himself, told Gentle Maiden he would come again the next day, as they bade the girl and the people of the snow-bound village good-bye.

As when on their journey to the town Mr. Hatch and his dapple-gray led the way, so did they take the lead in traveling homeward. The

wind had risen again, but the path broken in the morning was not yet filled in with the snow and very good progress was made. The short day, however, was near its close and the gloom of the coming night settled down in the silent forest while the strangely mated travelers were still three miles or more from home.

"I'll have some news to tell Ree—the fact that the mysterious Indian's name is Killdeer and that he is a friend of Captain Pipe, who for some reason doesn't mind who he kills," John was thinking as he rode carelessly along, when the Quaker called out to him:

"Beware of the strange savage who desireth only to kill, and hath no courage in him—always shooting from behind."

"He's got you marked up on his arm as already dead, you know, Mr. Hatch, and you should be in no danger," John laughingly called in reply.

But barely had he finished the sentence when he was seized from behind and a dirty hand was clasped so quickly and tightly over his mouth

that he could not utter a sound. Vainly he struggled, but he was dragged down into the snow and could not release himself.

So occupied was John in doing his best to escape, or at least to cry out in warning to the Quaker, that he did not see what had happened to his companion.

The facts were that Mr. Hatch's mare, being very much more sensitive and alert than slow-going Neb, had suddenly shied upon passing a large poplar tree, and as a man sprang from behind it to seize him, as another seized John, the horse gave so violent a leap forward that the fellow grasped only at the air, though his intended victim was almost thrown from the saddle.

The old gentleman looked around, and seeing John's horse, startled from its slow walk to a gallop, coming up behind, and having no doubt that the boy was lying low on the animal's back to escape whatever danger threatened, he gave his mare free rein. On and on he hastened through the snow, followed by the frightened

unridden horse, nor did he stop until, dazed by excitement, the dapple-gray panting and perspiring as though it were a hot day in July, he drew up at the cabin door.

Meanwhile John's captor had been reinforced by the fellow who had failed to catch the Quaker.

"Nice mess you made of the job, I must say!" angrily growled the man who held John down, the lad's face buried in the snow, as the other man came up.

By a vigorous squirm, rising partly on his hands and knees, John succeeded in turning over and getting his first look at the fellow who had seized him. Instantly he recognized the "Indian" who had visited the cabin, ~~still~~ in Indian costume, though there was no doubt that his skin was white.

"So it is you, is it, Duff?" said the boy calmly as he could. "I would recognize your angelic temper anywhere."

Duff paid no attention to the remark, save to hold his captive the tighter, but continued to

upbraid his companion for failing to secure the "blasted, pious old fool of a Quaker."

"Ain't no use jawin'; nobody never did nothin' what they couldn't do," the other man made answer.

"And you, too, Dexter," John spoke up. "We had a nice visit with Mr. Duff, the other evening, and wished you could have come along. And how is it that Landlord Quilling is not with you?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEARCH.

The feelings of Return Kingdom when he saw the Quaker come galloping up to the cabin door, his beloved mare wet with perspiration, and closely followed by their own horse, riderless, were different than he had ever experienced. He had never known the true meaning of fear and never had he known a moment when his courage and hope seemed to desert him so entirely as now.

There flashed upon his mind a picture of John Jerome's body stretched in the snow as he had seen Quilling's; of the lone Indian stooping over it to secure the awful trophy of his silent warfare against the whites. With his old-

time determination, however, the lad shook off these fearful thoughts, and as Theodore Hatch's feet touched the ground, was at his side.

"John—?"

Ree could not ask the question in his mind. His voice sunk to a husky whisper.

"Verily, I do not know," said the Quaker in hushed, frightened tones. "I thought he was on his horse until but a little while ago. An Indian attacked me and I escaped. I thought thy friend was coming on behind till I chanced to look back, a mile from here."

"Tell me all about it just as quick as you can, Mr. Hatch." There was pleading and yet an imperative command in Kingdom's voice.

"We were midway betwixt here and the Indian town, but I scarce know what happened. A savage in hiding behind a tree leaped out upon me and would have seized me but Phœbe bounded beyond his reach, nor stopped till now. Thy beloved friend was behind me. His horse

kept close up and I thought the lad was with me till but a few minutes since."

"Were no guns fired? Did you hear John cry out?"

"Verily, I know not."

"It may be that John was swept off his horse by the low limbs of a tree," said Ree, hope coming to him with the thought. "Was it the lone Indian—the one you saw before, who attacked you?"

"I cannot say—I cannot say."

The Quaker was trembling violently from his exertion and fright, and Ree pitied him, though he almost despised the man who could give only so wretched an account of what had happened, when information was so badly needed.

"Mount your mare and come after me. Show me the place where you were attacked."

Kingdom seized his rifle, which was always within reach, and at one bound was upon Neb's back. The Quaker began a protest, but the lad did not—would not—hear. It was now quite dark and the howling wind and penetrating cold

added to the hardship of the work to be done and lessened the likelihood of success; but the man dared not disobey the boy's command.

The sweeping gale was fast filling in the path the horses had made along the trail to the Indian town, but the animals themselves were able to find it, though in the darkness the men would not have been. The Quaker recollected the point at which he had first missed John and there Ree dismounted and walked. But it was no use; for, though often he mistook a half-buried log or stump for the body of him he sought, he discovered nothing in the darkness which would indicate whether John had been killed or carried off, or had only fallen, wounded, from his horse.

Not until they had reached the village of the Delawares did the searchers pause in their hunt. Theodore Hatch had been unable to locate definitely the spot at which he was attacked, and Ree pushed on to the Indian town hoping to find some tidings. But neither Gentle

Maiden nor any of the others could give any information.

“Has the lone Indian been seen near here to-day?”

The question revealed Ree's secret fear.

“He has not been here,” the girl answered. “Gentle Maiden would tell the white brother if he had come or gone. His hate is deep, his gun shoots straight. His war is his own war.”

There was sadness in the Indian maiden's voice which betrayed her own fears. Thus did she confirm her white friend's belief that John had fallen a victim of the solitary savage whose thirst for revenge upon the whites knew no limit.

What was the reason of the bitter, personal, persistent warfare he carried on? In his heart, as the thoughts stirred his kindly nature to vengeance, Ree vowed that he would not quit the country of the Ohio until he had killed this lone Indian, and without John he would remain no longer than he should need to complete that task.

The Quaker would have remained in the Indian village for the remainder of the night, and the Indians, roused from their slumbers by the arrival of the white men, invited Ree, also, to stay, but he would not think of it. Back along the trail, therefore, the boy walking, the Quaker astride his mare, the two plodded the weary miles to the cabin again, searching all the way for the body they dreaded to find.

Ree fed the jaded horses when home was reached, and the exhausted Quaker, lying down, was soon asleep, hugging his prized saddle bags with one arm beneath his pillow, as usual.

For the younger man there was no rest. He put the rude snowshoes he had made, in order, and broiled and ate portions of a wild turkey he had caught in the deep snow while making the rounds of their traps in the absence of his chum and Mr. Hatch during the day. He reloaded his two pistols and refilled his powder horn and bullet pouch, then waited.

Impatiently he spent the remaining hour or two until the first sign of daylight, and then,

awakening the Quaker, cautioned him to remain near the cabin and watch closely for any indication of danger. He feared that Duff and Dexter might chance to visit the vicinity, and knew they would not hesitate to kill the old gentleman, to procure his portion of the divided fortune letter, if they found him alone.

The morning was breaking over the bleak, wintry forest as Ree set forth. With two pistols in his belt, his rifle over his shoulder and food and medicine in the pouch hung at his side, he had no concern for his own safety; but he did fear deeply for one he loved more.

He went at once along the trail toward the Indian town, closely scrutinizing the drifted snow and the trees and bushes on both sides thereof. Nowhere did he find the least encouragement until he came to a great poplar tree about which there was evidence that the snow had been disturbed and tramped down the day before, though the traces were now well-nigh obliterated.

The place answered to the meager description

Theodore Hatch had given of the spot at which the assault was made, but in his uncertainty the anxious boy knew but one thing to do. He hurried on, resolving, if he found no better clue, to return and look far and wide about this spot in hope of discovering some sign of tracks leading away from it.

With desperate haste the unhappy boy traversed the trail clear back to the Delaware town. The Indians were astir and two boys, Flying Fish and Little Wolf, were preparing to go hunting with bows and arrows. They were equipped with snowshoes and ready for a long journey. Both offered to join the "white brother" in his search, but Ree thanked them and told them only that if they discovered any trace of the missing one to carry word to the town and the cabin as quickly as they could. He would reward them well, he said.

Without loss of time the anxious lad then returned to the big poplar tree beside the trail. Half the forenoon had passed, but the day had come bright and clear with scarcely any wind.

It would have been a glorious day for hunting, but any day must be gloomy when one's best friend is strangely missing, and may be dead or dying, and there was no sunshine in the heart of the lonely boy who traversed the snow-bound forest.

At last, a quarter of a mile to the right of the point where the trail passed the big poplar, Ree did discover, in a protected valley, the tracks of three persons. Minutely he examined them, but the fine snow had so sifted in that he could not tell whether they were those of Indians or otherwise, or whether or not John might have made any of the footprints. He hastened in the direction in which they led, however, though surprised to see that they would pass only a mile or so to the eastward from the cabin, unless the course changed.

As a more open portion of the forest was reached, the last evidence of the tracks disappeared. Still Ree kept on. He saw that he would come out somewhere in the sheltered valley of the Cuyahoga, if he continued in the di-

rection he had first taken, and if he found no one in hiding there, as he believed he might, since the valley gave protection from the winds and snow, he might at least discover the lost trail there, in some of the sheltered places.

As time proved, Ree's decision was wise. He had gone scarcely a half mile farther when he came upon fresh tracks in the snow. They were those of but two persons apparently, and of Indians, the young pioneer believed; but he remembered that frequently in traveling Indians take great care to step in the footprints of one another and thus conceal their real number from any one discovering their trail, and he took up this fresh clue at increased speed. Five minutes later he caught sight of two figures ahead of him. One was a white man, he judged from the dress, the other an Indian.

"Ho, brothers! What's your hurry?" the boy called.

The men stopped and looked back. Both were Indians, Ree then saw, though one was dressed in the clothing of a white man.

“How?” called one of them.

“White Fox—white brother—how?” the other of the Redmen exclaimed, and Ree then recognized them as Long Arrow and Beaver Hair, the Mingoës whom he had caught in the act of stealing the canoe he and John had purchased the year before of Captain Pipe. Moreover, he discovered, as he approached, that the fellow in white men’s clothing was wearing the identical suit which he had seen the robber, Duff, wear. It was easy to guess then how Duff had come by the Indian costume he wore on his recent visit to the cabin.

“Tell me where I will find the white brother with whom you traded clothes,” said Ree, as he shook hands with the Indians. “His name is Duff and he now wears the dress of the Mingo for no good purpose.”

“Ugh,” was the only answer the Indians made. They could not understand how the white lad could tell at once with whom the exchange had been made.

“No see Spotted Face—Spotted Face no

friend of young brother White Fox," said Long Arrow, who wore Duff's clothes.

It was Duff whom he called "Spotted Face," referring to the marks the smallpox had left.

"Spotted Face ask Long Arrow and ask Beaver Hair to burn house of white brothers," put in the other Indian. "Say white brother killed Black Eagle."

Here was news of a very interesting kind. Duff, then, had been trying to turn these two Indians against himself and John, had he? These were Ree's thoughts.

"Spotted Face say give heap firewater—heap money—for Long Arrow and Beaver Hair to carry off white brother and hide him in cave where Spotted Face has his bed," Long Arrow said.

This was more interesting news. Duff, it may have been, had kidnaped John, after having failed to prevail upon the Indians to do it.

"And my Mingo friends would not do so," Ree answered, shaking hands with the savages

again. "I thank you both; and Spotted Face—"

"Tongue of Spotted Face speaks crooked—crooked as snakes when asleep," said Beaver Hair, referring to serpents which lie coiled when sunning themselves. "Because Killdeer—him you call the lone Indian—saw Spotted Face kill Black Eagle. Young white brother not kill Black Eagle. Killdeer saw him die."

What in the world would he next hear of this marvelous lone Indian who seemed in all places at all times? So thought Ree, deeply impressed by the pointed climax his Indian friends had reached. Inwardly, as the thought flew upon his mind, he thanked fortune that the vanishing savage had at least been the means of thwarting the design of the unscrupulous Duff to turn these Mingoes against himself and John, by telling them of the cruel murder of kind old Black Eagle.

"Does Duff—Spotted Face—know that Killdeer saw him strike the Black Eagle down?" Ree asked, glad to know the name of the solitary savage, at last.

The Indians shook their heads.

"Killdeer get him bime-by," said Long Arrow significantly. "Killdeer's war is his own war."

And here was still more to set Ree to thinking—two Mingoës, not especially friendly with the Delawares, saying of the lone Indian just as Gentle Maiden had said, "His war is his own war." What was the secret of it all? He asked Long Arrow and he asked Beaver Hair then and there. Neither would answer.

"Killdeer has not shct at me nor at your other white brother for a long time," said Ree. "Has he no war against us?"

"Yes, Killdeer has," was the answer. "He be heap bad—kill anybody—get many scalps."

This was not very pleasant information, but time was passing and Ree could not press his inquiries further. He asked the Indians whether they had seen the trail of any persons in the woods, and they answered that they had not. He told them briefly then of John's disappearance, but they did not volunteer to help him

in his search, and bidding them good-bye, he hastened on, eating some dried venison as he went.

The unhappy lad's mind was filled with conflicting thoughts. Was it the mysterious savage, Killdeer, or was it Duff who had attacked John and the Quaker? Why should Duff have wished to have John kidnaped? The questions were still puzzling him when suddenly he discovered another freshly-made trail in the snow. The tracks were those of a man, but whether Indian or Paleface he could not tell.

"A white man, I should guess from their size," the boy was saying to himself, "Indians nearly always have small—"

"Stand!"

It was the voice of Duff, and as Ree looked up, startled by the unexpected command, he gazed at the muzzle of a rifle in the hands of that scoundrel, not a score of yards distant.

"I've been hunting you this good while, and now, by the eternal, I've got ye," the villain said.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAVE OF THE FORTUNE HUNTERS.

John's sarcasm, as he spoke of Duff's visit to the cabin, cost him a vigorous blow upon the mouth from that individual's open, dirty hand. The evil-tempered fellow was very much disposed to vent on his prisoner his spite against Dexter for failing to capture Theodore Hatch.

For full five minutes he continued to growl and swear while his companion patiently and submissively waited for his anger to cool.

John, realizing the uselessness of calling for help in that lonely woods, and knowing that Mr. Hatch would not pause till he reached the cabin, now lay quite still, wondering what would be done with him. He could readily see that in

trying to kidnap the Quaker the robbers had had in mind securing the half of the hidden treasure letter which they so greatly wanted; but why should they wish to catch or kill him? They should know that the letter was not likely to be in his possession. He knew his situation was perilous—that no more unscrupulous man than Duff was to be found; but still, somehow, he was not greatly frightened. He only hoped that his captors would remain where they were long enough for Ree to find them; for surely his chum would start out to rescue him immediately when Mr. Hatch reached home and related what had happened.

“Get up!”

It was Duff who spoke, and he accompanied the command with a volley of oaths. The prisoner willingly obeyed. He was becoming very cold lying prostrate in the snow.

In wonderfully quick time Duff went through John's pockets and the pouch which hung at his belt, taking everything he found, which, for-

tunately, was nothing more than a hunting knife and pistol.

“Take his gun and push out fast, ahead, Dexter. I’ll follow close behind, and you, young fellow, keep just behind your good friend here, and just ahead of me, and attempt no monkey business, or I’ll blow your brains out! Now, march!”

With a quick glance around to get his bearings, John walked off as Dexter led the way. He noticed regretfully that it was now quite dark in the woods, and the wind was again blowing so hard that their tracks through the snow would be quickly obscured.

Not a word was spoken by either of the men as they stumbled on over the rough ground and through the drifts. Off to the right the wolves were howling and in his heart John found himself wishing the animals would attack the men whose unwilling companion he was. Still he was not afraid, but felt instead a kind of buoyancy of spirits, born of the excitement of his adventure, no doubt, which led him to call out, though he did not turn around:

"You seem to have turned Indian for sure, Duff! I can't say that I like you any better that way, though. Where'd you get the Redskin duds?"

"Say, young smart Aleck, just one word more, and I'll knock ye seven ways for Sunday! And you can lay to that!"

Duff growled the threat so viciously that John had scarcely the courage to give a long, shrill, peculiar whistle, but he did do so, and secretly hoped Ree Kingdom would somehow hear it; for it was the call that had been used by them for years. But there came no answer to the summons, except a muttered curse from Duff, who, with an oath, ordered Dexter to make more haste.

For hours, it seemed to John, the silent march continued. At first he knew just where he was, but as it became darker and wolves howled not only on one but on all sides, and the wind swirled and swept so in all directions that he could not keep his bearings, he lost all knowledge of his whereabouts except to know that he

was in a very unpleasant predicament, to say the least, and he wished heartily that he was out of it.

It was almost midnight, as nearly as John could judge, when, after winding in and out for some time through dark ravines, whose rocky walls rose high above their heads, making the darkness so intense that they could scarcely see the snow at their feet, Duff and Dexter mounted to a rough ledge four or five feet above the level of the valley in which they were, and dragged their captive up after them. He knew at once, as he found a low, rocky roof above his head, that they were in the mouth of a cave of some sort. He felt the warmer air from within on his cold face, and quickly guessed that the end of the wearisome journey had been reached at last.

"Make a light," commanded Duff, and stepping forward he seized John's arm, as if afraid the boy might attempt to escape.

"Never mind hanging on to me, Duff; I don't feel like running very far. I wouldn't mind

something to eat, though," the lad said, while Dexter, obedient to his chief's order, knelt in the darkness and by much puffing and blowing kindled a small fire from a few live coals remaining of a blaze the two men evidently had left when starting out.

Duff gave no heed to the words of his prisoner, but still holding to his arm led him to a log a few feet deeper within the cavern than the fire, built near its wide mouth, and they both sat down.

"Get something to eat," was the next order of the captain, and Dexter slunk away to another part of the cave.

While he waited by Duff's side John made as thorough an inspection of the cave as he could by the flickering firelight. It did not appear very deep though the roof was twice as high as a man, and its yawning mouth extended nearly its entire width of probably twenty feet. Still comparatively little snow had drifted in and the floor was dry and hard. In one corner not far from the fire was a pile of leaves on which some

skins and blankets were spread, while hanging on the forks of a sapling cut off half way up and now leaning against the wall, were a frying pan and other cooking utensils.

It was apparent that the two robbers, and Quilling, also, before his mysterious death, had for some time made the place their home. It was strange, John thought, that neither he nor Ree had discovered their presence there, for he believed he recognized the chief rocky ravine through which he had been led, as a spot he had sometimes visited when hunting, a place only a few miles east and north of their cabin.

"Kind of ghost-like around here," the boy remarked, smiling grimly as the firelight cast spectral shadows in the deeper parts of the cavern and upon the rough walls. "Seems to me I can see the ghosts of Quilling and Black Eagle right now."

"Dry up! Blast your noisy tongue, dry up!" growled Duff beneath his breath, while involuntarily he shuddered and glanced around.

"Oh, what a guilty conscience," thought

John, mentally resolving to make use of this discovery that his captor was afraid of ghosts, if the opportunity came to him.

"Ain't nothin' much here to eat, I don't see," complained Dexter, who was raking bright coals out of the fire preparatory to broiling some venison. "'Specially bein's we've got company," he added, with a grin toward John.

Nevertheless the venison was soon sending out a delicious odor and, though it did develop that the quantity of the food was limited, the meat was excellent. To do the two men justice, too, it must be said to their credit that they shared equally with their captive. The question of what they intended to do with that young man, however, was one which John greatly desired to have answered; but no answer came.

Their supper over, Dexter, at Duff's command—it seemed that the former was obliged to do all the physical labor—brought stout thongs of twisted buckskin and John was speedily bound hand and foot, and then pushed and thrown upon the bed of leaves and skins in the

corner. Duff and Dexter also lay down, one on either side of the prisoner.

The bunk was wide and not uncomfortable. John could not but think that he was in the place that Hank Quilling had lately occupied,—and so thinking he fell asleep. Sheer fatigue made him almost insensible of the danger he was in, though well he knew the desperate character of the men between whom he lay.

It was daylight when John awoke, the bonds upon his wrists and ankles instantly, painfully reminding him of where he was and bringing to his mind the unhappy recollection of all that had happened. Neither Duff nor Dexter was on the bed beside him, and, rolling over, he looked around. There sat Dexter on the log by the fire.

“Hi, there!” called John.

“Jest don’t you say nothin’. I’m to knock yer blasted brains out if ye holler. er say a word. Them’s Duff’s own words. Lay still an’ don’t say nothin’ an’ I won’t do ye no harm, an’ I’ll git ye a bite to eat.”

So saying Dexter sliced off a few cuts of meat from a nearly consumed fore quarter of a deer and prepared it for the prisoner. Not even to allow him to eat, however, did the fellow release the boy's hands, but instead, fed him himself.

"It was too bad Quilling was killed the way he was," said John, as he ate, wishing to appear friendly, for he believed Dexter was not at heart nearly so bad a man as his villainous companion.

"Bub, jest you shet up. Ye ain't allowed to say nothin'. Them's the orders."

But after a pause of several minutes, Dexter added: "Duff didn't say as I couldn't talk none, though, an' I kin say yes, 'twas too bad as Quilling got killed. But it was his own fault. When Duff goes to yer hut as an Injun, plannin' to get what he was after, an' left me an' Quilling at the edge o' the woods t' help him if he needed it, or to draw you chaps out some way, an' give him a better chance, if he didn't come back by midnight, Quilling an' me stood under a tree with low limbs where we wouldn't be

seen by anybody. Then Quilling got scared—allus was a blamed baby anyhow,—an' he begun to chatter an' talk 'bout how he wished he had stayed to home. 'An' I'm goin' to holler to Duff this minute that I want t' go home an' he's got t' go with me,' he says, speakin' up loud. An' with that he steps out into the clearin', when 'bang!' he tumbled over like a rabbit, an' in a jiffy there come pouncin' onto him a devil of an Injun that has been hangin' round these parts a long time.

"An' this Injun ain't no nat'ral critter at all. He comes an' goes too quick fer that. He's a Injun witch, that's what he is, an' 'fore I knew it I was yellin' 'help,' an' hootin' like a owl, which was the sign agreed on to call Duff out if we had to have him; an' then I goes racin' into the woods like all get out. Duff comes runnin' after me, cursin' awful, he was that mad. But he knew Quilling was a goner an' we,—we jest lit out fer our cave here. We was watchin' from the woods when you an' the Quaker chap started out to the Injun town an' then it

was that Duff says we would ketch ye, an' we did, an' what's next to be did is fer me to know an' you to find out, as the sayin' is."

John, it is sure, was greatly interested in what he had heard. And now, as Dexter showed no signs of speaking further, though he seemed to like to hear his own tongue going, the captive tried hard to think of some seemingly innocent question or remark which would start the fellow talking once more. At last he said:

"Honest truth, Mr. Dexter, I was not spying on you that night away back at the Eagle tavern when I went for a drink of water and found you and Duff and Quilling reading a letter."

"Young feller, you keep still. Don't you say nothin'; that's what! But ye needn't think Duff lays it up ag'in ye that ye came onto us sudden-like that night at Quilling's place. He don't remember nothin' about it, I don't s'pose. Why, him an' me had only got to Quilling's that same night; an' of course we didn't know what Quilling wanted till we got there. He was jest a-goin' to show us that letter or piece o' one,

when you chaps come along. Quilling didn't know himself jest what the thing meant, but he knew it told about money buried in the ground an' he knew that this chap Nesbit had done good business liftin' jew'lry an' coin from folks along the roads an' places. He knew enough to guess pretty straight as how Duff would be the man to help find the other part of the letter, 'cause he had seen Nesbit have it, an' he sent fer him, an' Duff an' me went together. But while yer talkin', boy, only ye ain't allowed to talk none, an' I'll knock yer blasted brains out if ye do, this here ain't my reg'lar trade, an' I vow, if there's much more killin' an' slavin' fer Duff, I'm a-goin' t' quit it."

Dexter paused and put a few sticks of wood on the fire.

"It's 'bout time Duff was comin' back," he said, as he sat down again. "Duff's gone to hunt yer pardner an' if he don't give him what he wants, he's goin' to knock yer blasted brains out an' scalp ye jest the same as though that Injun witch had did it, an' it'll be laid onto the

Injun. Duff's wrote a letter on bark with charcoal that says that, an' now ye know what yer chances be. I don't think I had ought to have told you about it, though, so I don't. It'll make ye feel bad an' Duff would be crazy if he knowed it. So don't you never say nothin' to him about it. Maybe, though, Duff will find yer pardner gone to hunt ye, an' if he does, maybe he kin find that there letter at the cabin. 'Twon't trouble him none if that there fool Quaker is there or not."

John was far from comfortable as he learned Duff's monstrous plan. He could not believe that Ree would surrender the letter, which was not his property, but the property of Theodore Hatch, without a struggle, and he knew that Duff would not hesitate to kill. The result, it was all too likely, would be that Duff, in one of his furious passions would commit murder and John Jerome would never greet his friends again.

So, for the fiftieth time, the boy tried to move his hands or feet to work loose the thongs which

bound them, but he could not. He had been tied as though he were a giant and dangerous as the most ferocious wild beast.

“Ye see I was jest a farm hand an’ never was in the line as Duff was in, until he got me into this one, sayin’ it would only be a job of findin’ a box o’ gold buried in the ground, an’ I could handle a spade so good,” Dexter continued, talking as though to himself. “But it ain’t been like he said. I ain’t no coward like Quilling, but if this here scheme Duff’s now workin’ don’t do the business, I’m goin’ to quit—I’m goin’ to quit.”

Dexter shook his head gloomily. It was undoubtedly a “blue” day for him. He rose and walked out just beyond the mouth of the cave. The wind was not blowing now and sunlight in the frost-laden atmosphere gave to all the white landscape a sparkling brilliancy.

“I’m goin’ to quit,” the fellow murmured despondently again, and his words were as a prophecy.

From a clump of bushes above, at the top of

the steep hill across the ravine, clearly visible through the bare, gray trees, there came a puff of smoke; a rifle sounded, and Dexter, shading his eyes with one hand, looking down the valley in search of Duff, whom he would see never again, sprang high into the air. As though it were some inanimate thing his body fell backward at full length upon the ground, and from his temple trickled a tiny stream of crimson, staining the snow.

CHAPTER XVII.

FLYING FISH'S CLEVER SHOT.

What John Jerome would not have given to have his hands and feet free and his trusty rifle in his possession, when he heard a gun discharged and saw Dexter leap and fall, dying, would be hard to tell. In genuine fear, as he realized the horror and helplessness of his situation, should Indians, or whoever the attacking party might be, rush up to the cave, he rolled over and over to the darkest crevice into which he could squeeze himself, at the farthest end of the shallow cavern.

All was quiet. Somewhere near him he could hear water falling drop by drop in the warm recesses of the earth, but nothing else. And then

the thought came to him that it might have been Ree who fired. He knew his chum would be searching for him. He was tempted, as this hope rose in his heart, to sound their whistle call, but hesitated. That he did so was fortunate.

Stealthily peering around the rocky walls of his prison John in another minute saw the painted face of the lone Indian. In his teeth he held a dirty, blood-stained knife.

In a fever of suppressed excitement and fear lest he be seen, the lad in the dimmest corner crouched closer to the wall. But the eyes of Killdeer were filled with the white glare of the snow; he could not see into the deeper portions of the cave, nor did he try, seemingly, only satisfying himself that no one was there, save himself and the white man whose face looked up to the sun, risen for him for the last time.

“Ugh!”

With a suppressed cry of hate, the Indian sprang upon his victim. Like lightning flashes were his movements as in his right hand the

scalping knife flew from his mouth to its horrible work, while he knelt on the corpse of Dexter.

John Jerome shivered as he saw the dexterity, the result of much practice, with which the savage cut the awful trophy he coveted from the dead man's head, and with a quick jerk of his hand threw the fresh blood from the scalp, sending it sprinkling the snow. More deliberately then, the Redskin wove the frightful evidence of his work upon a belt with other scalps. Deliberately, also, he calmly pricked with paint and a sharp piece of bone which he took from his pouch, a black circlet upon his left arm, already scarred in many places by such evidences of the bloodshed he had caused.

For more than an hour, it seemed to John, Killdeer was thus diabolically occupied, but at last he helped himself out of the powder horn and bullet pouch still fastened upon the unfortunate Dexter's body, and departed, quickly and stealthily as he had come.

Still John remained closely in his place of hiding, sick and dispirited by the terrible scene

he had witnessed. Once he struggled madly with his bonds, but he could do nothing in the narrow place into which he had pushed. Gathering courage presently, however, he crept out into a wider space. Again he tried to loosen the thongs, but could not. His failure made him desperate. Soon Duff would be returning; indeed, Dexter had apparently been looking for him when he was shot.

"I must be away from here before the old sinner gets back," the lad told himself, and began in a blind, helpless fashion sawing the rawhide which tied his wrists, against a sharp corner of a rock. But he could not see his hands and often cut them far more than he cut the tough strips holding them fast. So giving over the attempt to use the rock as a knife, he worked himself out to the mouth of the cave, hoping to find a blade of some kind. Perhaps there was one in Dexter's belt. He would see, he thought, and crept nearer.

Scouring the valley in search of game two Indian boys approached the cavern in which

Duff, Dexter and Quilling had established their winter quarters. They did not know a cave was there and would have passed it by, but for some slight movement which attracted their attention through the bushes. Simultaneously their approach was noticed by John Jerome, but he did not see them plainly through the brush, and, thinking it might be friends of Killdeer still prowling near, he ducked down, flat in the snow at the cavern's mouth.

It was this movement on John's part that fully attracted the attention of the Indian boys and they cautiously crept forward through the bushes. The little ledge before the cave was high as their heads, and they might yet have passed on, but for the tracks they discovered. Seeing these, they paused. It was then that John, guardedly glancing up, recognized them.

"Hi, there, little brothers, Flying Fish and Little Wolf," he called, "climb up here and cut me loose! And say, don't lose a minute!"

"Young Paleface!" ejaculated one of the youthful bucks from the Delaware town, out for

a long hunt, and he sprang up to the ledge. The other followed, and in a few seconds they were at John's side, vastly more astonished than they pretended to be, at what they saw—the white boy securely bound, and another Paleface dead beside him.

“Ugh,” said young Flying Fish, and Little Wolf said the same.

“Well, cut me loose, friends! I may be pretty interesting to look at, but I don't enjoy the situation, you see,” spoke John, just a little impatiently, and in another minute he was free.

Briefly the white boy told the little Redskins what had happened, and they replied by letting him know how Ree had been searching for him.

“Well, we will just light out of here in a hurry,” John exclaimed. “Which of you chaps wants a gun? Here, this one you shall own between you. Poor Dexter will never need it again,” and he gave the dead man's rifle over to his new found friends.

Great as was his desire to get away from the cave as quickly as possible, John made a hasty

but careful search for the half of the fortune letter which he knew the robbers had, before going. He found nothing, however, and recovering his own rifle, and turning to the Indian boys again, he said:

“Come along home with me and I will give you something to remember me by, for the lucky way you happened to come along just when I wanted to see you—or somebody—mighty badly.” So saying, he sprang off the ledge, shutting his eyes as he passed the dead man’s body, to shut out the awful sight.

With scarcely a word the Indian youths followed their white leader, traveling much more easily than he, however, for they had snowshoes, while he had none.

Knowing that Duff had set out to go to the cabin, and fearful that, if Ree were absent, as was more than likely, the fellow might do harm to the Quaker, John made the best speed possible, following Duff’s tracks closely. It was already past noon, and unless the cabin was farther distant than he judged, he was likely to

meet Duff returning. For that individual, therefore, he kept his eyes wide open straight ahead and on both sides.

Failing, as he had done before, to find out from the Indian boys anything which would throw light upon the secret of the warfare Killdeer carried on, John ceased to attempt to converse with them as all three pushed forward noiselessly.

“Stand!”

The imperative order rang through a clump of bushes from somewhere on ahead, and instantly John’s hand was raised to command a halt and silence.

The quick instinct of the Indian boys prompted obedience, and peering forward the young captain of the party held his breath. There was his own chum, Ree Kingdom, covered by a rifle in the hands of the scoundrel Duff.

What was to be done? He thought fast. He did not wish to kill the fellow he both feared and hated, and to fire his gun to frighten him would leave himself defenseless until he could reload,

as Dexter's rifle was not to be depended upon. Quick as wink a plan came to him.

"Flying Fish," he whispered, as the Indian boys leaned forward, observing, but unobserved by the villainous white man who faced them, while Ree, his back toward them, stood midway between—"Flying Fish, send an arrow through that Mingo head-dress the Paleface Duff, yonder, wears—quick—and don't miss!"

Scarcely was the command spoken when the Indian boy executed it. With extraordinary speed he tightened his bow string and pausing but for the twentieth part of a second to take aim, the youthful buck let fly a feathered, pointed shaft.

Swifter than the eye could follow it the arrow went. Squarely above his eyes and not more than an inch above the crown of his head the long, slender piece of rounded oak struck the band of the Indian hat of feathers Duff was wearing, and carried the head dress several yards to the rear. In great surprise Duff lowered his rifle.

With a yell of victory John leaped into the open, the Indian boys following with actual war-whoops. A shriek of terror and a curse upon his fortune burst involuntarily from the robber's lips.

"Put a ball through the black-hearted villain if he moves, Ree!" cried John, and Kingdom, scarcely less surprised than Duff himself, quickly regained his self-possession, and threw his rifle squarely in line with the fellow's heart. He held the stock to his shoulder with his right hand, while he shook hands with his dearest friend, so suddenly restored to him, not for one second, however, taking his eyes off the rascal on whom the tables had been so unexpectedly turned.

Beneath his breath Duff cursed and swore. He trembled so violently in his impotent rage the boys feared he would fall flat in the snow.

In very few words John told what had happened, while the Indian boys stood mutely by, enjoying the excitement hugely, though calm and cool as the snow drifts about them.

The mention of Dexter's name reached the ears of Duff as John briefly related his experiences. The robber listened intently. He heard John tell how Dexter had been killed and scalped, and a shudder ran through him. He glanced around as if fearful that even at that moment Killdeer might be taking aim at him; and suddenly giving way to an overwhelming impulse of fear, he ran to the boys, crying in distressing tones:

"Don't shoot! Don't—don't shoot! Honest, I never did you any harm—'Twas Dexter—Dexter and Quilling!"

"Look here, Mr. Duff, we want none of you or your company. Watch him, John," Ree spoke sternly. "Just you make the least hostile move—"

"Say, where have you been since you left your cave? You've been to our cabin, that's where you've been! Now tell what you did to Theodore Hatch! Speak up, you"—John was going to say "cut-throat," but he hated to use

so harsh a word now that the poor wretch was begging for mercy.

"I didn't see the Quaker at all—I didn't even see him. I hope to die, if I did," Duff answered. "There wasn't a soul at the cabin, and I wrote a few words on your table and came away."

"Well, what did you write? We may as well get this business transacted all at once and be done with it," put in Ree, taking no pains to conceal his dislike for the miserable creature before him.

"I wrote that not a bit of harm should come to this young man here"—jerking his head toward John—"if you would put the half of that letter you got off of Ichabod Nesbit, some place where I could get it."

"Now you look a here, Mr. Duff, and understand once and for all that that letter is not our property. It is true we found it, but we have turned it over to its rightful owner, and we do not intend to allow you to steal it from him, as you stole the other half of the letter back there at the Eagle tavern!"

“Rightful owner! Rightful owner, you say! I’d like to know who its rightful owner is! It ain’t that hypocritical old Quaker, I can tell you!” and Duff added a volley of oaths to his exclamations. His temper had got away with him again and a murderous gleam in his eyes made his ugly face repulsive as a wolf’s.

John smiled with a good deal of satisfaction as he thought how the villain’s plan had been thwarted and how unsuccessfully the fellow had plotted to do him injury if the ransom demanded—the letter—were not forthcoming.

“I guess you won’t hurt me very much even if you don’t get the letter, will you, Duff?” he said. “What shall we do with him, Ree? Make him hand over the part of that letter which he has, I say! Shall we?”

“We will turn him over to Killdeer if he ever comes near the cabin again, or annoys Theodore Hatch in any way,” Ree answered decisively. Then turning to Duff, he said:

“We would be justified in hanging your good-for-nothing carcass on a tree for the brutal mur-

der of our friend Black Eagle, but we are going to let you go. And what you better do is to get back to the settlements just as fast as you can. You led Quilling and Dexter to their deaths and you will lose your own life if you stay here. You needn't hope to get hold of that writing that the Quaker has because he will not give it up, and it is only because it has caused too much trouble already that we don't make you give up the part of the letter which you have. But you better leave these parts. Killdeer will kill you if you don't. You probably don't know that he saw you murder poor old Black Eagle."

"He—saw me—that blasted Indian saw me." —Duff's voice sank to a frightened whisper. "I could tell you something," he went on, recovering himself with a great effort, and abruptly changing the subject. "I could tell you young chaps something, but you wouldn't believe me, and it would do no good. That letter belongs to me. No, I knew you wouldn't believe me, but you'll live to be sorry you didn't, you'll see."

"I think you better be going. You should

want to take care of Dexter's body before it is dark, and the wolves may be there ahead of you, now," said John, quietly. He was anxious to be alone with Ree, and to hurry home.

Without a word Duff put his rifle over his shoulder and plodded off through the snow. His face was haggard, his figure bent with fatigue and endurance, and in the ill-fitting Indian dress he wore he made a most forlorn spectacle.

"Long-knife Duff goin' to die pretty quick," observed one of the Indian lads. "Heap sick."

Not once did Duff look back. When he was out of sight, the two boys, followed by their Indian friends, set out at a brisk walk for home.

"I do not understand what Duff meant by saying the Quaker was not at the cabin. It worries me some," said Ree. "But it may be that Mr. Hatch saw the fellow coming and hid somewhere."

"And what did Duff mean by saying he had more right to that letter than Cousin Theodore?" John put in.

"Oh, he was only talking. How could it be

otherwise?" said Ree in a tone that seemed to settle the matter; but long afterward he wished most earnestly that he had been less hasty in his judgment; that he had at least asked Duff to tell by what right he laid claim to the letter the Quaker had.

"Friend Hatch hasn't a very big fire going, at any rate," said John when the cabin came in sight and he saw no smoke coming from the chimney.

Ree made no answer, but walked faster. It was almost night, and if the Quaker had been carried off or killed, it would be well to know it while daylight lasted.

Together the boys stepped into the cabin. It was dark and silent.

"Look in the barn," said Ree, and led the way to the lean-to in which the horses were kept. The Quaker's mare was not there.

"Perhaps he has gone to the Delaware town," John suggested.

"Hello, here are Phoebe's tracks, and they go in the very opposite direction," Ree exclaimed

at the same moment, in answer. "Now what can the old fellow be up to? Surely he isn't riding out for his health!"

"Ugh, see horse!" grunted Little Wolf, and pointed to the north.

There was Phoebe, galloping toward the cabin, riderless, the saddle stirrups flying loose at her side. In another minute the mare had reached the cabin, neighing and stamping her feet, plainly trying to speak.

"Where's the Quaker, Phoebe? Where's your master?" said John, patting the animal's forehead.

A look of intelligence shone in the mare's eyes in answer and she started off at a trot in the direction whence she had come, looking back and stopping, when no one followed.

"Baked beans and johnnycake!" exclaimed John excitedly. "I believe Killdeer has been trying to kill the Quaker again, and this time has succeeded!"

"It looks bad—mighty bad. Build up a good fire, John, and get some supper ready, and I'll

follow the mare; she may not go far," Ree answered.

Without more ado he started, and Phœbe, seeing him coming, trotted slowly on again, neighing plaintively.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A THOROUGHLY BAD INDIAN.

The intelligence shown by the Quaker's dapple-gray was marvelous. Seeing that Ree was not keeping up, as she trotted through the snow, the mare stopped and waited until he reached her side. Still she did not move, but seemed to be trying to tell her friend to climb into the saddle.

"Want me to ride, do you, Phœbe? All right," Ree said, and the moment his feet were in the stirrups, the horse started on though the reins fell loose upon her neck.

"I expect that if Theodore Hatch knew he was separated from his saddle bags he would die of worry if nothing else," thought Ree, as he

noticed that the Quaker's most valued possessions were securely fastened to the saddle. Deeply the boy pondered, also, upon the mysterious absence of the old gentleman, and thinking of the strange events of the day and knowing from John's story that the lone Indian was in the vicinity, he greatly feared, as his chum had suggested, that Killdeer had killed the Quaker at last, or that Duff, perhaps, had lied when he said he had not seen Mr. Hatch.

"I'd better be watching out for the Redskin myself," the boy mentally declared, as the dapple-gray carried him farther and farther into the rough, broken country to the north of the cabin. But he was very weary with his recent exertions and genuinely disappointed that instead of the rest and supper before the blazing fire, to which he had looked forward from the time he had found John, he must now be still out in the cold, still hungry and still searching for one whom he feared he would find dead. It was almost dark now and the air was sharp and frosty. He had not minded the cold so much

while walking, but riding chilled him thoroughly.

"Phœbe, I'll take a run by your side," the boy exclaimed, and quick as the thought flung himself to the ground.

Never in his life had Ree done a more fortunate thing. His quick, impulsive action undoubtedly saved his life. At the very moment he jumped from the saddle a bullet whizzed where his head had been an instant before, the ball whistling most threateningly in the crisp air.

The sudden danger startled Ree tremendously, and his benumbed limbs being awkward, he lost his balance and fell headlong into the snow.

From the shelter of some scrubby trees along a ridge fifty yards away, an Indian ran forward as Ree fell, and with a smothered cry of triumph raced toward the boy. It was Killdeer, and his belief that his shot had tumbled the white boy from his horse, nearly cost him his life.

Getting to his feet, Ree saw the savage run-

ning nearer. With a little yell of surprise the Redskin turned to dart away again, as he discovered that his intended victim was not dead, but instantly the boy's rifle was at his shoulder. Quick as lightning his eye measured the distance to the fleeing Indian, and he fired.

Killdeer was running zigzag and making the most of every tree whose trunk he could put between himself and Ree; but the deep snow retarded his movements, usually so fleet, and—he knew no more. The bullet laid him low.

There was no thought of triumph or gladness in Ree Kingdom's mind as he saw the Indian pitch forward into the drifts. It was the first time he had killed a human being except in the heat of battle, he reflected, and it made him shudder to think of it, though he was well aware that Killdeer had meant to kill him.

With a word to the horse, which had gone but a few steps, then stopped, the boy was going forward to see whether the Indian was dead or only wounded, when he heard a voice he recognized not a hundred yards away, crying:

"Help! Help!"

It was the Quaker. Where could he be? Phœbe recognized the voice and with an appealing look toward Ree, went in the direction of the call. The boy hurried after her.

If Ree had been anything but quiet and sober by nature, he would have laughed outright over the discovery made. As it was he could not resist a smile, and he smiled more broadly still as he thought how John would have laughed.

Theodore Hatch was imprisoned in a wolf pen. At a glance Ree saw it all. He had climbed into the pen to arrange the bait and the massive lid had fallen, shutting him in.

"Verily, I am glad thou art come! What torments I have suffered, and what dangers!"

"Well, you can thank your mare for it, Mr. Hatch. We would never have known where to look for you, but for her. Rise up now, and help me lift the lid. We sometimes kill wolves with a knife fastened in a pole before we open the pen, but you probably would not relish that."

Ree had completely recovered his composure and as he talked he was raising the heavy cover of the pen which shut the Quaker in. The wolf trap was made of logs in the form of a large box. Over the top was a heavy cover of small logs bound together, which was so arranged that, being left half open, it would fall as wolves or other animals pulled at the bait fastened to a spindle inside. The lid was heavy of necessity, and one man could scarcely manage it alone.

“As thou wert away I thought to visit and set the traps for thee. The lid came down on me whilst I was putting the bait in place. Verily, I thought I should die. I called and called for help, then at last feared to call again lest I bring down the savages or those robber white men upon me. And I heard two shots just as you came, and it filled me with fright—wert thou shooting, or who?”

The Quaker was out of the trap by this time, half-frozen but mightily pleased to be rescued. He shook both Ree's hands, but not before he

had given Phœbe a kinder caress and whispered his thanks to her.

"Yes, our old friend the vanishing Indian and I had a little skirmish," Ree answered to the Quaker's question. "He did not vanish quite quick enough this time. The snow bothered him, poor fellow."

Leading the mare and compelling Mr. Hatch to walk to get his blood in circulation and give him warmth, Ree led the way to where Killdeer lay.

The snow in the Indian's long, black hair was found stained with blood, but the body still heaved with the breath of life.

"He is not dead but pretty badly stunned," said Ree, kneeling beside the savage. "It is too dark to see how badly he is hurt. Lead the mare up, we will take him to the cabin, and maybe we can fix him up."

"Kill him! kill him! Has he not tried to murder all of us?" cried Theodore Hatch, turning his head away and rubbing his hands distressfully.

“But maybe we can civilize him,” Ree suggested, a little crossly.

The Quaker made no response, but stood idly by while Kingdøm lifted up Killdeer’s unconscious form, and, thanks to his strong back and arms, was able to place the body astride the mare.

“Now let’s walk fast, Mr. Hatch. John will be worried. I only hope he did not hear the shooting!”

The Quaker seemed to be sorry for the way he had spoken in urging the death of Killdeer, before the cabin was reached, and in a half-hearted way apologized to Ree. But he said as he did so :

“Now had it been that rascal Duff whom thou hadst wounded, I could wish him no mercy. Yea, I wish it were he who had been shot that we might obtain the writing to make my poor aunt’s torn letter complete.”

Ree made no answer, though he thought much over the Quaker’s changeable manner—how one day he was wanting to be a missionary among

the Delawares, and the very next day seeking the life of a fellow being for the sake of securing hidden wealth of uncertain quantity and value; how on several occasions he had refused to try to recover the valuable writing stolen from him, and yet now wished for Duff's death that the letter might be obtained. It was all very strange.

The astonishment of John Jerome as Ree carried Killdeer, still unconscious, into the cabin in his arms and placed him gently upon his own bunk in the corner was complete. The two Indian boys, who were to remain with the young pioneers all night, were scarcely surprised. All three recognized the savage at once. No one, indeed, who had even seen the hideously painted features of the Redskin could forget them.

With Indian stolidity, however, Little Wolf and Flying Fish said not a word. With John it was different.

"My stars, Ree!"

The three short words expressed a great deal. They asked, without directly doing so, "What

has happened?" and "Why did you bring that murderer here?"

"He thought he had picked me off the mare, and I wounded him as he was running up to get a lock of my hair," Ree explained with a grim smile. "He has only a scalp wound, I guess, and when he comes to we will see if we can't civilize him. At least we will find out the reason for this secret war he carries on against all white people."

"If he don't kill us all in our beds and hang our hair on that belt of his!" John ejaculated.

The remark made Ree shiver, for as the words were spoken the flap of the loose shirt-like coat the savage wore was turned back, revealing nearly a dozen of the awful trophies of his attacks on hunters, settlers and Palefaces wherever he found them.

John did not see these things. He had stepped out to the barn to help Theodore Hatch feed his mare a spare quantity of the coarse hay remaining, and the next minute his long, hearty laugh indicated that he had learned from that

gentleman the adventure the latter had had in trying to set the wolf trap.

A hot venison stew made a grand supper for the two friends, the Quaker and their guests, the Indian lads, that night, and as they ate there was much to talk about, so full of adventures for all had the day been.

Uppermost in the mind of John, however, was the terrible picture his thoughts presented—the body of Dexter lying cold in death at the mouth of the lonely cave, and the knowledge that the murderer was at the present moment lying unconscious within hand's reach, his wounded head tied up and resting on the best pillow the cabin afforded.

In Ree's thoughts the ashy color of the disfigured face of Duff as he learned of the death of Dexter was the one thing ever foremost. And Theodore Hatch was thinking more than for a long time of the prospect that the missing half of the hidden-fortune letter would yet fall into his hands without effort on his part. With his mysterious saddle bags for a cushion he seemed

quite comfortable in these reflections, and as John reminded him that it was probably his cries for help which had attracted Killdeer to the vicinity of the wolf pen, he declared his intention of quitting so hostile a country as soon as he could secure the writing known to be in Duff's possession.

The old gentleman was visibly worried by the presence of the wounded Indian and not once did he look toward the unconscious form on the bunk behind him.

"You want to make mighty sure he is not playing 'possum,' " said John to Ree, half jokingly, half in earnest, referring to Killdeer. "You bet I'll sleep with one eye open!"

"We will take care of that," Ree answered, and with the lines from Neb's harness he tied the Indian's body to the bed in such a way that the fellow would not be greatly discommoded, but yet could not move far without attracting attention.

On the floor beside the Indian boys Ree made his bed, while John lay down beside the Quaker,

and nearly caused the old gentleman to suffer nervous prostration by humorously asking if he might not have the saddle bags for a pillow.

If Killdeer regained consciousness during the night, no one knew it. The Seven Sleepers slept no more soundly than did the weary occupants of the far-away cabin.

The Indian seemed still insensible when the boys arose, but as Ree bathed his face and forehead with cold water, he opened his eyes. There was not, however, any sign of recognition in them, and he made no resistance as some broth was fed him.

Another change had come over Theodore Hatch during the night. He was again anxious for the welfare of the Delawares, and he and John accompanied Little Wolf and Flying Fish to the town, the boy pioneers first bestowing upon the young bucks presents of knives, which they greatly prized. Of course the Quaker made the journey on horseback. Of course he took his saddle bags with him; but he said in confidence to Ree as he started:

"I may make my home with the Delawares, doing what good I can. I have sinned and I have coveted earthly riches. Twice hast thou saved my life. I cannot repay thee, but I can give my services to these poor Indians, who are our friends, and—another day I will tell thee more."

Sorrowfully the old man shook his head.

The cold weather, it seemed, had spent itself. This day the wind blew from the south and there was every indication of a genuine January thaw. The water ran in rivulets from the cabin roof and by night, when John and the Quaker safely returned, a warm rain was falling. Ree had spent the day without adventure, keeping close to the cabin to care for his prisoner patient.

The Indian gained consciousness during the evening as the boys and Mr. Hatch were seated before the cheery fireplace. The instant Ree discovered the savage trying to sit up, he was at his side.

"Lie still. You are badly hurt and we will make you well," he said, kindly.

"Heap big fool," was the savage's ungrateful reply, scowling venomously in his benefactor's face, and John, who had little faith in his chum's plan to reform the Redskin, smiled, and winked at Mr. Hatch. The latter looked sorrowful, however, and rubbed his hands.

As the weather became very mild and the rain continued all night and most of the next day, the Cuyahoga became a wide, deep, swiftly moving stream. Ree and John boldly launched their canoe, however, in spite of the dangers from floating ice.

Going down stream they did well enough; coming back it was hard work indeed, struggling against the current, though they bent their stout ash paddles almost to the point of breaking. They told the Quaker of the adventure when at supper. Afterward Mr. Hatch told them in whispers that in their absence Killdeer, whom he had been left to watch, had made a desperate attempt to free himself, after having lain all day

in sullen silence, refusing even to eat and rejecting all kindnesses. His struggles had begun when he chanced to discover that the scalp was missing from the Quaker's head.

"Verily, I was much frightened. He seemed for the first time to recognize me," the old gentleman confessed.

Even as he spoke a thundering blow crashed upon the rude table over which Theodore Hatch was leaning. It missed his head by a quarter of an inch and split the table squarely in two.

At the same moment a frightful yell sounded in the little cabin and the next instant a dark figure leaped through the open door and vanished. It was Killdeer.

Ree was first to recover from the sudden surprise of the attack, and, rifle in hand, he sprang into the outer air. The darkness had already fallen and he could see nothing.

One thing only was certain—the wounded Indian had slipped from under the straps bound across his body, and was gone. That he had

not killed the Quaker was by the narrowest chance.

“There is no doubt he recognized you, Mr. Hatch, and was furious to think he carried your scalp at his belt while you were still alive,” said John. “I hadn’t intended to tell you, but it is true that he has your scalp, for I saw it. And he has carried it away with him.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MIDNIGHT BATTLE.

“Good riddance,” said John, standing before the fireplace as Ree returned from a fruitless search in the neighborhood of the cabin for some trace of the lone Indian.

“No, it is too bad it happened,” Ree answered soberly. “Because he has abused our kindness and will hate us the worse on that account. I think he has been generally inclined to let us alone, but from now on we must be on our guard. We must have been very careless to let him get away as he did, even taking his rifle with him.”

“Either we were careless or Killdeer is sleek as greased tallow; a little of both, but a great deal the more of the latter,” John replied.

Naturally Theodore Hatch was greatly disturbed over his narrow escape from the Indian's tomahawk. As the two friends sat, one on either side of the cheerful fire, later in the evening, the Quaker from his seat directly before the blaze spoke after a long silence, saying:

"Young friends, I have tarried long among you, and in the Scriptures it says, 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house, lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.' I—"

With some friendly word John was interrupting to tell the old gentleman not to worry on that score, but he continued:

"Verily, I have sinned, and 'treasures of wickedness profit nothing; but righteousness delivereth from death.' I shall not be long with thee and when I am gone, bury my bones in some quiet place here in these forest wilds. I have seen only suffering and death follow upon my transgressions, and my repentance must be in giving my remaining days to the good of these poor savages. Search no more for the poor, unfortunate Duff nor seek to obtain from

the writing he has, which, with that in my possession, tells where earthly treasure is hidden near Philadelphia. It is better far that the buried fortune be never found. It has caused only woe—only sorrow. But when I am gone, dear young friends, my mare shall be your own and all that is mine you shall divide equally. In my saddle bags wilt thou find papers and other articles. Think not too hardly of me, as I lie cold in death. None may ever know my temptations.”

With a weary sigh, his face still ashy pale, and shaking his trembling hand to stop their words, as both boys began speaking, hoping to dispel his melancholy thoughts, the Quaker immediately retired, leaving Ree and John considerably mystified.

Early the following morning Kingdom went to turn the horses out that they might browse on the tender branches and eat of the withered grass about the clearing now within their reach as the snow was gone; and, having done so, he stood on the bluff beside the cabin, watching the

swirling, rapid river. Then it was that he made a discovery. The canoe, which had been drawn up on the shore where the bank was not steep, at the north of the water-swept ridge the cabin occupied, was gone.

Could it have floated away? No—Killdeer had taken it. The manner of the craft's disappearance he could not doubt from the moment the thought came to him. The rain had washed away any tracks the Indian might have left, but Ree was sure he was right. Killdeer had heard them talking of the canoe, and had used it in getting away.

John, also, felt that such was surely the case when Ree called to him making known his discovery.

"The heathen!" he exclaimed. "When he is done with it, he will leave it in the water, and like as not it is in Lake Erie by this time. I'm sorry, because we can't get another until Captain Pipe comes home, and I did so want to make a trip clear to the lake, some time!"

"We will make a search for the canoe when

the water goes down a little, any way," Ree answered hopefully; and then he suggested that they spend the day at fence building and clearing land, of which work they had accomplished much less than they had planned to do, because of the deep snow and other interruptions.

Indeed, thus far the boys had been far from realizing their hopes. While they had a considerable number of deer skins and other furs of value, of their own procuring, they had done scarcely any trading with the Indians, for want of some one to trade with, and the winter had been much less profitable than the preceding one.

A hard day's work while the Quaker looked on, very quiet and melancholy, was followed by a hearty supper and early going to bed. In a similar way the next day was spent, but toward evening the lads shouldered their guns and walked down the river a considerable distance, hoping they might find their canoe or get a shot at a deer, perhaps. The wild turkeys would be industriously feeding, too, now that the snow

was gone, and they were anxious to obtain one or more for their larder.

A mile from the cabin a small stream emptied into the river, and as they reached it, much such a discovery as was made by Robinson Crusoe of old, was made by John. There in the soft earth left by the receding water was the imprint of a moccasined foot.

A low whistle came from the boy's lips as he pointed his finger to show Ree the cause of his surprise.

"And here are more!" exclaimed Kingdom, in a low voice. "I should judge that a dozen Indians had crossed here. Who could it have been?"

Ordinarily John would have been no more frightened than Ree, but the disappearing daylight, the exceeding quiet, save for the murmuring waters, and the loneliness of the spot in which the tracks were found, served to affect him deeply, and a growing dread and a fear he could not express came over him.

"Let's hurry home," he said in hushed tones.

"I feel—I feel as though something were going to happen."

Ree laughed quietly, but followed close upon his friend's heels as the latter turned and walked swiftly in the direction of the cabin.

Even when their home was reached and the blazing fireplace sent its good cheer to warm and comfort him, John could not shake off the depression and apprehensiveness which had come over his thoughts, but insisted on closing the door and frequently looking stealthily out through the loop holes.

"Listen to me," Ree reasoned with him. "We have been here for months and have had no trouble except with that rascal, Killdeer. It is because the Indians have been away and we have seen scarcely any of them, that those foot-prints gave you the feeling of danger being near. Now, do be reasonable, John. Turn Ring out of doors and he will bark if any one comes near, and you sit down here and be comfortable."

"Well, I suppose you are right," was John's

answer. "But—I'd rather do this way, and as for trusting Ring, my opinion of him isn't any too high after he lay perfectly still and let Killdeer jump up, get his gun and tomahawk and pretty near kill Mr. Hatch, and then get away as he did."

"Well, you couldn't have expected the dog to do anything else when we were treating the Indian in a friendly way. You couldn't expect Ring to know more than we did!"

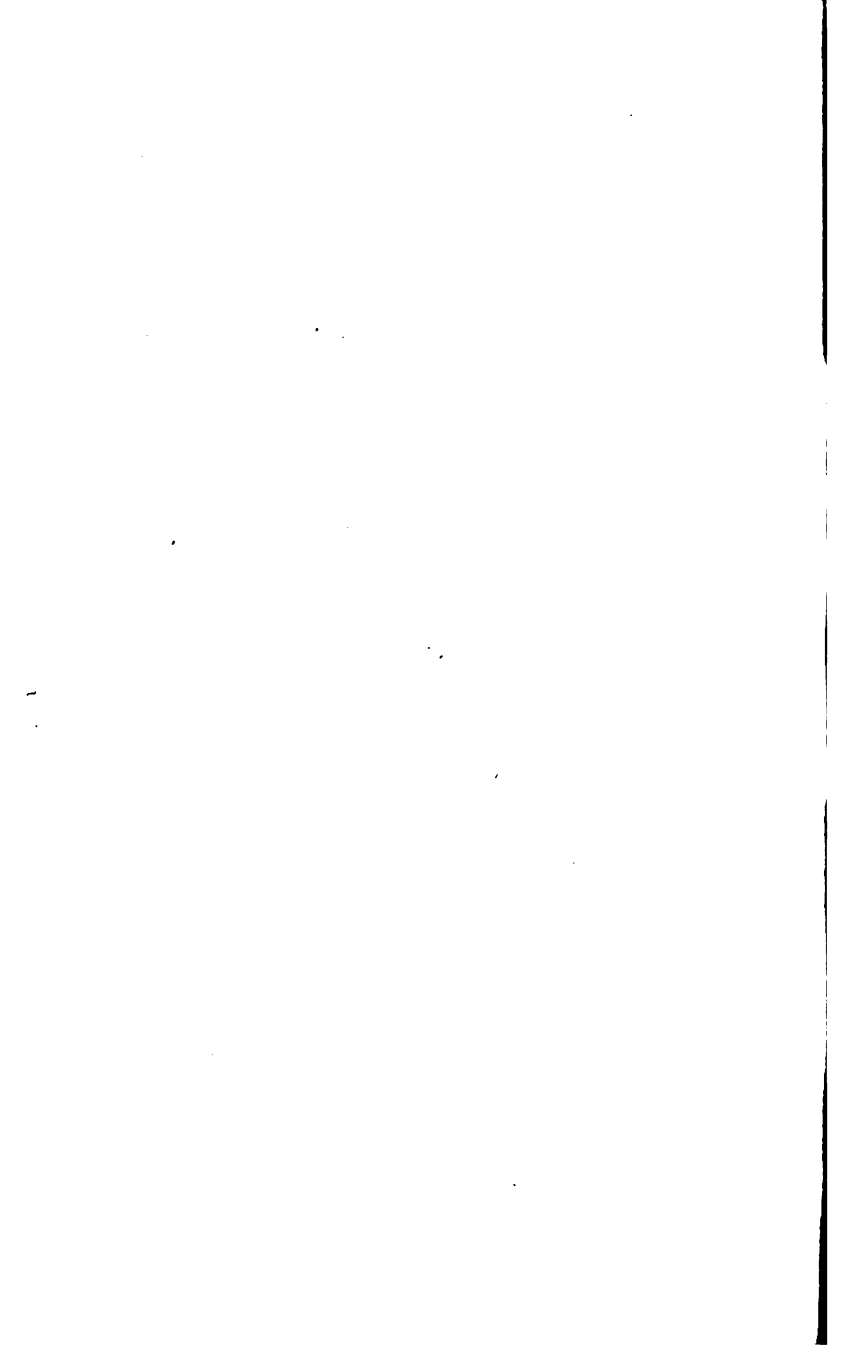
But John would not be persuaded. Was it some sixth sense—some more than human instinct which in that time of danger prompted the boy's vigilance? Was it Fate which, working out its own plans, gave him this feeling that he must be on his guard? Much more likely it was He who sees even the fall of a sparrow, who was watching over the lonely cabin so far from the homes of civilized men, that night, as always, and in His own mysterious way caused one of the brave boys to be on guard.

It was still early when Mr. Hatch and Kingdom went to bed. John helped cover the fire



/ His face was haggard, his figure bent with fatigue and endurance.

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with ashes that it might keep until morning, making the cabin totally dark, but said he would remain up awhile, peeping out now and then, just to satisfy himself that Killdeer or other Indians were not prowling near.

The truth was, he could not shake off the dread with which the footprints by the creek had filled him. He would have been infinitely less alarmed had he seen the Indians who made them, themselves, instead.

The hours dragged on toward midnight and Ree, tired of expostulating with his friend, went to sleep. The Quaker had long since been snoring. Still John sat quietly before the fireplace or stood gazing from a loop hole.

From the shadows of the woods across the clearing twelve dusky figures crept one by one. They were already well out of the forest when John, going to look out again, saw them, not all at once, but here and there one as they moved silently in different directions. Then a cloud came before the moon, and he could see nothing.

Yet he waited at his post, fearing to wake Ree until he knew there was real danger.

When the moonlight shone clearly again, he discovered that the savages were spreading out on all sides as though to surround the cabin, while two were stealthily approaching the house—no, it was the barn they wished to reach, for now they crept in a direct line toward the corner in which the barn door was.

John had seen enough. Softly he turned to Ree's bunk. He placed his hand over his friend's mouth to prevent his speaking too loudly, as he might when suddenly disturbed, then whispered to him:

"Ree, the cabin is surrounded by Indians!"

If a gun had been discharged just over his head, Ree could not have sprung up more quickly. In an instant, and without a word, he was at a loop hole.

Again, however, the moon was behind the clouds and he could see nothing. In his mind was the thought that John might have been the

victim of his own imagination, but he would not say so for the world.

"Shall I wake Mr. Hatch?" John whispered, depending on Ree for directions, as he always did.

Instead of answering Kingdom seized a pistol and through the loop hole fired.

"They are stealing the horses," he cried in a low voice. "Open the door and after them!"

John obeyed instantly, while Ree almost jumped into his clothes; but the moment the door was opened there came a crash of rifles, accompanied by horrible yells. A half dozen bullets with quick little thuds, buried themselves in the wood at John's side.

"Come back, John!"

Ree's order was heeded before it was spoken, and the door crashed shut in answer. For a few seconds all was quiet, and then a burst of flame shot up outside the cabin.

"They've fired the stable!"

In frightened, thrilling tones John yelled the words, and even as he spoke the reddish yellow

glare was seen through the crevices between the logs which separated the lean-to barn from the interior of the cabin.

“They’ve taken the horses and set the hay on fire!” John cried again, the next instant, and as if in derisive reply there came a chorus of war-whoops and savage yells from without, while within, Theodore Hatch, awakened by the noise, grasped his saddle bags tightly and loudly pleaded to be saved—begged that he be not left alone; and Ring’s barking added to the tumult and excitement.

Already the flames were lighting up the cabin, glowing through the half-chinked wall like a red-hot furnace, and the smoke and odor of the burning hay came creeping in as though to stifle all.

“We can’t stay here and be burned up! We’ve got to run for it! Come on! Hurry, Mr. Hatch!”

John’s voice was desperate, and in another moment he would have led the way in flight to almost certain death.

“Wait!”

Stern in its calmness was the word Ree spoke. Pushing a bear skin before him, he was on the floor creeping through a hole leading into the stable,—a hole which had been sawed out that their dog might at any time go quickly from the cabin into the barn and so watch over both. Poor Ring! He was of little use now.

Thus getting into the barn with all haste, Ree sought to smother the flames with the bear skin while they still burned in the hay alone. But he was too late. The smoke blinded and nearly suffocated him. The heat burned his unprotected face and the bear skin was not large enough to envelop the fire, already burning in every part of the hay stored in a corner of the rude stable.

Never had Kingdom been so at a loss to know what to do. The horses were gone, the logs of the barn were now ablaze. The cabin must be saved, or they would be driven unprotected into the very arms of the savages.

“Hand me the axe,” he called, and John, who

was at that moment half way through the opening leading to the barn, quickly retreated and secured an axe for each from their place beside the chimney.

With furious haste he sprang again to the low opening through which he must go. He passed an axe to Ree, then crawled after it, heedless of the flames which roared around him—heedless of the burns he received from the many red-hot tongues licking up the wisps of hay scattered on the stable's earthen floor.

As he rose to his feet in the choking smoke and heat, he saw Ree, almost surrounded by fire. He was attacking, with the fury of a giant in battle, the upright posts by which the logs of the lean-to were held in place against the cabin wall.

With equal zeal and energy John rained blows upon the supports at the other side, the hot coals falling about his head, the fiery tongues of flame scorching his moccasins and legs till he could have screamed out in pain.

One never knows how much he can do in a

minute's time till put to the test; and it was not more than sixty seconds, though it seemed much longer, until the side walls of the stable were knocked loose from the cabin and the light logs came tumbling down. Still the end wall farthest from the cabin stood, though 'twas burning fiercely, the hay having been against it.

Seizing a burning pole which had fallen from the roof, Ree rammed it hard against the flaming timbers. Instantly John was helping him and their united strength did the work. With a crash the wall fell outward. It dragged away from the cabin with it the logs of the side walls, and the poles and bark of the roof came tumbling about the boys' heads.

Loud yells from all directions followed as an echo the noise of the falling logs. The Indians had little thought that inside the roaring furnace the burning barn made, two boys were working like more than human beings to save themselves and home, and their shrieks showed their chagrin. Disappointed in their expectations that soon the cabin door must open or the

Palefaces be burned alive, they leaped forward in mad eagerness.

A shower of bullets sang over Ree's head. John was already half through the "cat hole,"—the low opening in the cabin wall. In one more second Ree would have followed, but—as he stopped to kneel, a faintness seized him, his head grew light and darkness came before his eyes. Fainting from his tremendous exertions and partial suffocation, he fell prostrate.

Thinking Ree was safely following him, John was no sooner in the cabin than he seized his rifle and rushed to a loop hole. He did not notice Theodore Hatch standing in the doorway, the door wide open, and Ring barking at his side; and he did not think of Ree until a horrid yell, much nearer than the others, sounded close at hand and he turned to that side of the cabin. The fire still blazed, and through the wide crevices he saw by its light a savage draw his tomahawk and whirl it above his head.

Just what followed John never was quite certain. He thought he saw Ree standing as though

he knew not what to do; the Indian rushing upon him, and paused in astonishment. His rifle went off as though of its own accord and the Redskin tumbled in a heap.

The Indian's fall was the first thing that John fully realized. He had shot him down in his excitement without really knowing it; but at the instant the savage went down the plucky boy discovered Ree lying flat just outside the cabin, his buckskin clothing smoking, the Indians dashing nearer with hideous yells. He flew to the "cat hole" to draw his friend's body in. As he did so there came an awful crash behind him, and he heard the Quaker shriek and groan.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VICTORY.

The fear which weighed upon John Jerome's heart, as he hurriedly drew the unconscious form of his friend through the low opening into the cabin, regardless of the attack made upon Theodore Hatch, cannot be told in words.

It was as though the battle had been fought and lost, and if Ree were dead he cared not how quickly his own end came. Yet he did not pause nor for an instant again lose his head.

With Kingdom's senseless form safely in the cabin, he ran to the open door, and leaping over the body of the Quaker lying just inside, caught one brief glance of a scene which he never forgot as long as he lived. Ring's teeth were fas-

tened in the shoulder of a savage staggering under the attack and his sharp nails were tearing the fellow's skin to shreds, while the Redskin, vainly trying to shake the dog off, stabbed him again and again, his mighty arm moving with the rapidity of lightning.

Even as John looked the Indian and the dog went down together, and the foremost of the Redskins rushing onward, leaped over them just as the boy slammed the heavy door, the huge wooden latch clicking into place as an accompaniment to their furious cries.

Most fortunately for John and his friends the lucky shot by which he laid low the savage who would have tomahawked Ree, had served to check the charge of the other Indians for a minute or two. And they might not have closed in again so soon but for the attack one bold fellow had made on Theodore Hatch in the open doorway. It was this savage who felt Ring's fangs and was beaten down by the faithful dog, now lying dead beside him, bleeding from a score of wounds.

John knew his pistols were on the fireplace mantel and in a moment he had them. By the firelight outside he could see the Indians far better than they could see him, and he fired two shots in rapid succession. What injury he did he could not tell, but was satisfied to see the savages retreating, carrying off the body of the one who had been shot while attacking Ree, and helping away the buck so badly hurt by Ring.

That the discontinuance of the attack was only temporary John was certain. The tiny cabin offered too good a chance for victory and plunder to be passed by, especially now that one of the Indians had been killed; yet the brave boy defending his home was very thankful for the lull in the battle. Though his own burns and bruises nearly crazed him, he now hastened to the relief of Ree.

With infinite joy he found that his friend still breathed, and lifting him to a bunk he placed him upon it and sprinkled water on his face. That simple restorative was enough. Almost immediately Kingdom's eyes opened and before

he could be restrained he was sitting up, holding his dizzy head between his hands and asking John if he were hurt.

A sorry sight the boy presented. His hair and eyebrows and lashes were singed to a yellow brown, his clothes were burned black in places and his hands and face were sorely scorched and scratched. The smoke which had filled his eyes left them red and watery and only by an effort could he see at all. In a dazed, wondering way he watched John drawing the unconscious form of the Quaker toward a bunk, then suddenly remembering all that had happened, he got to his feet to help.

"You lie down," John Jerome commanded; but, although he had to set his teeth and use all his power of will to endure his pain and keep up, Ree aided in caring for Mr. Hatch.

The old gentleman's wound was only a bad gash on the shoulder, made by a tomahawk which had missed his head, and he had fainted from fright. As best they could in their haste the boys bound up the wound beside the old

man's collar bone and then Ree made the discovery that not a gun or pistol in the cabin was loaded. He could have scolded John for such forgetfulness, but remembering all that he had done, said not a word, though he at once saw to it that bullets were rammed home in every weapon.

It was only natural that Ree should take command of the forces of the tiny fortress the moment he was on his feet. While John had done nobly when left to his own resources, no sooner was his beloved friend astir than he became unable to direct affairs himself and had to depend on Kingdom to give the orders, which, however, he executed willingly.

The Indians did not at once resume the battle, nor, as the boys looked searchingly out, was a solitary one of them to be seen. The day was breaking now, raw and bleak. It was safe to believe that, if the savages did not return before it was entirely light, they would not come during the day.

The young pioneers, however, were willing to

take no chances. Too well they remembered the disastrous result of having been over-venturesome when the cabin was attacked the previous spring. So while Ree alternately looked through the loop holes and rubbed his burns with fresh bear grease, John kept one eye upon the smoldering ruins of the barn, which might even yet set the cabin ablaze, and with the other optic and his hands ministered further to the needs of Theodore Hatch.

The Quaker in course of time came to his senses and Ree, having heard from John how the old gentleman had stood in the open door while the stable burned, quite sharply cautioned him against showing such boldness again, reminding him that he had put all their lives in peril.

“Yea, verily, ’twas a grievous error,” Mr. Hatch admitted dolefully, his hands pressed to the scalpless crown of his head. “Yet, dear friends, I meant well,” he said further. “I have told thee of the love all Indians had for the illustrious William Penn, himself a Quaker, and

how they have ever treated our sect with consideration. And thinking of these things I opened the door to command the savages to depart in peace. I fear they did not hear me, the fire was crackling and roaring so."

What to make of their elderly friend as they heard this was such a puzzle to the boys that neither said more. Ree looked tired and pained, and seeing the expression on his face so amused John that this in connection with what the Quaker had said made him laugh aloud.

"Thou art too merry by far, young man," broke out Mr. Hatch petulantly—"too merry by far when we remember that the savages have our horses! Poor, sweet Phœbe!" he moaned. "Dost think, Ree, the Indians will return the mare to me? Can we not get the horses back?"

Kingdom refrained from speaking crossly as he felt, John's laugh having softened his displeasure, and he only said, quietly: "We will have to see about that when our lives are safe, Mr. Hatch. And when our copper-colored friends come back, you must take pistols and

help in the fighting. You can load for us at least."

The suggestion that the Indians would probably return distressed the Quaker more and more. He closed his eyes and the movement of his lips revealed that he was praying.

Somehow his simple devotions made even John feel more kindly toward the old man, and pitying him, he sought after a time to make him more comfortable in his bed by rearranging the bolster under his head and covering him up well, for as the fire had been buried in ashes all night and was nearly out, it was cold in the cabin. As he did this he noticed that that which was usually under Mr. Hatch's head or safely held in his arms was missing.

"Why, where are your saddle bags?" he asked.

It was as if an earthquake had occurred, so suddenly did the Quaker rise up in his bunk. Under the bolster, under the blankets and skins of the bed, under the bunk itself—everywhere, he searched—with utmost anxiety.

"Gone!"

The old man spoke the word as though it choked him

"Gone," he said again, his voice only a hoarse whisper, and lying down he moaned pitifully.

Ree and John could but look at one another. At first they said the saddle bags surely could not have walked away, and made light of the matter, assuring Mr. Hatch that his much-prized property must undoubtedly be about the cabin somewhere. They wondered if the Quaker might not know more of the loss than he told them.

"Was your half of that fortune letter in your saddle bags, Mr. Hatch?" Ree asked.

"Nay—I have it in my pocket; that is safe," groaned the old man.

"Well, don't worry, then, we can make some new saddle bags," put in John Jerome with pretended cheerfulness, hoping to cause the Quaker to tell why he was so grieved over his loss.

The remark was unheeded, and John gave Ree a look which told his disappointment in not learning something about the bags' contents. But Kingdom was thinking; could it have been Duff who had led the attack upon the cabin? If not, who was it?—Killdeer was the only other one likely to do such a thing.

"No one came inside the cabin while the door was open, did there, Mr. Hatch?" Ree asked.

"Yea, verily, I think so."

"Who?"

"I think an Indian came in and that I smote him with my open hand upon his head as he ran out again."

"Do you think he carried off your saddle bags? Was it that man Duff?" Kingdom quickly inquired.

"Verily, verily, I do not know—I do not know," came the very unsatisfactory answer, and the old man covered his face with the blanket of his bunk.

John's patience was so nearly gone that he would have told Theodore Hatch "a thing or

two" then and there, but Ree, seeing what he was about to do, shook his head and the harsh words were not spoken.

"It looks very much as though Duff had rounded up those Indians—Chippewas, I think—and had come here for the very purpose of committing this robbery. I am sorry you opened the door, Mr. Hatch."

"Yea, verily," the Quaker answered.

"But if they have got what they wanted, they will hardly be coming back," Ree went on, still looking out of a loop-hole. "You keep close watch, though, John, and I will get some breakfast."

In a little while a fire was blazing on the broad hearth, and it did much to dispel the gloom from the minds of the two boys and from the cabin. But it could not pacify the Quaker, who, by this time, was denouncing his own carelessness in opening the door, one minute, and denouncing Duff, Killdeer and all the Indians in general, the next. Occasionally, too, he prayed forgive-

ness for having ever been tempted to try to obtain the mysterious hidden fortune.

Mr. Hatch, though not seriously wounded, would not rise to eat breakfast, and the two boys sat down by themselves, still discussing the attack upon them, and trying to decide who the Indians were.

Ree believed they were Chippewas from somewhere near the mouth of the Cuyahoga river on Lake Erie. He was saying that they were surely strange Indians, for all those living in the vicinity of the cabin were still absent from their homes, when with a sudden crash there came the sound of a rifle shot close at hand, and a bullet struck the wooden platter on the table between the lads, spinning it squarely into the fire.

“When will we learn to be careful?” Kingdom exclaimed quite coolly; but springing to his feet ready to fire, he peered out between the logs at the side of the cabin where the stable had stood.

John was on the alert no less quickly.

"There he goes," he cried. "It's Killdeer!"

At the speed of a deer the Indian was running across the clearing to the cover of the woods. Killdeer it was, and he must have approached the cabin no less quickly than he left it, for from end to end of the clearing no person had been in sight only a minute before.

"Can it be that he and Duff have gone into partnership?" asked Ree, speaking more to himself than to John.

"I'll bet that's just what they've done!" the latter exclaimed. "Killdeer would do anything."

"No," Ree declared, after further reflection, "don't you remember what Beaver Hair and Long Arrow said? That Killdeer saw Duff kill Black Eagle and would avenge the murder?"

"But who else than Duff would want to steal those saddle-bags?"

"Then, we will agree that Killdeer had nothing to do with the band which was here this morning, and is prowling by himself, as usual."

"But I am pretty sure the fellow that Ring keeled over was Killdeer," John persisted.

"They'll all bear watching," Ree replied, "and we are likely to have some excitement to-night, if not before."

It had already been suggested that preparations for another attack, when night came, must be made, or the cabin must be abandoned, and Kingdom's remark indicated that he expected to hold the fort. It was agreed then that while the boys worked at closing up every chink in the cabin walls, bringing in a large supply of wood and water, and putting everything in as strong a position of defense as possible, Theodore Hatch should watch that no Indian came in sight unobserved.

The saddest task the two boys had to perform they did first. The body of their faithful dog, cold and stiff and covered with blood, they placed upon the half-burned logs and poles of the stable, which they piled together, making a hot fire. Therein poor Ring was cremated. He had been a true friend, and it was no fault of

his that his finding of Ichabod Nesbit's snuff-box containing the fortune letter had resulted in so much trouble for his masters. For if the letter had not fallen into their hands, Duff, Dexter and Quilling would have found it and gone on their way. Surely it would have been better so, both Ree and John agreed.

A plan of which the boys had long thought came to them again as they worked. They wished to dig a tunnel from the floor of their cabin down to a point on a level with the water of the river which was just back of, and thirty feet lower than their house. The time was too short, however, to do the work that day. Moreover, without their canoe the tunnel might not be of much use, for Theodore Hatch could not swim, and, notwithstanding that he was positively a burden and not over-appreciative of what was done for him, he could not be abandoned.

The task of making all secure went on rapidly, despite the burns and aches the boys suffered. They stopped not at noon, though the

Quaker grumbled that he was very hungry, and so it was that, as the sun, which all day had been obscured by low, cold clouds, was going down, the two friends saw their cabin in better condition than ever before.

The boys had finished a walk of inspection all around their house, and each went to carry in a great armful of wood to add to the supply within, when suddenly there rang in their ears a short, sharp, thrilling cry.

Quick as frogs started from some sunny bank, they were diving into the cabin, when a second whoop—it was not a war-cry—reassured them.

Dashing across the clearing on a large, handsome, sorrel horse, guided only by a single rawhide strap about its nose, and riding bareback, his feathered head-dress and black hair streaming in the wind behind him, was an Indian. In a second, almost, he had sped up the slope and come close to the cabin. He reined his horse high upon its hind feet and leaped to the ground—Captain Pipe, the famous chief of the Delawares.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MASSACRE OF THE MORAVIANS.

With demeanor as cool and calm as though he had seen the boys but an hour before, Captain Pipe shook hands with them. He made no reference to his long absence fighting against the whites in western Ohio. He made no reference to his sensational parting with the boys the last time he had seen them, at which time, during their former residence near his town, he had, in a haughty manner, practically told them to leave the Delaware village. That was upon the eve of the departure of the Indians to take up the battle-axe.

With quiet friendliness in his tones he now said, after the exchange of formal greetings:

“Young white brothers’ horses are at the town of the Delawares. Hopocon has come to tell the young Long-knives this. Their cabin was attacked by the Redmen and their horses were stolen. One horse must go to the squaw of Gahonglas, who was shot by my white brothers. It shall be the gray mare. Then will the hatchet be buried by the young Long-knives and the Delawares. Hopocon has spoken.”

“Chief Hopocon is right,” answered Kingdom, falling into the Indian’s style of speech. “Chief Hopocon is just. The Redmen attacked our cabin, but without provocation. One was killed. Chief Hopocon says it was Gahonglas who died. Gahonglas would have killed us had he not been shot as we defended our property and our lives. The gray mare of which Chief Hopocon speaks is not the property of my brother who is with me here, nor of myself, but belongs to one who took no part in the fighting—a Quaker who loves the Delawares. He is in the cabin now.”

“Come right in, Chief. We will get supper,

and you can get acquainted with our friend the Quaker."

It was not easy for John to adopt the formal way of talking used by many of the Indians, and he did not try.

As the boys turned to enter the cabin, they found Theodore Hatch standing in the doorway.

"I am glad to shake thee by the hand," said the Quaker as Ree presented the Delaware chieftain. "Thou hast a lovely daughter, and she can tell thee, Chief Hopocon, all that my young friends here did for thy people whilst thou wert away. They were fed by us when much in need, and the dapple mare, Chief Hopocon, should not be taken from me."

"We will talk that all over later, Mr. Hatch," said Ree, leading the way into the cabin.

The early twilight was fast sinking into darkness. Among the hills to the north and east the wolves were howling—in full cry upon the trail of some lone deer, it may have been, and a horned owl hooted near at hand. Accustomed as the two boys were to such sounds, they could

not but notice them this night, a feeling of such quiet and security had come to them.

In but a few minutes there had been a tremendous change in their situation. The prospect of a night of fighting, the end of which no man could foresee, had been turned to the certainty of a night of rest and quiet, and the long weeks of danger and bloodshed all about them would now be succeeded by peace.

Captain Pipe, or Hopocon (his Indian name), would permit no more such conduct, the lads were sure. Moreover, the return of the Indians meant profitable trade with them. True, they had been killing and scalping white soldiers, and the soldiers and settlers had been making war on them; but this was not the affair of Return Kingdom and John Jerome, who had set out to live at peace with the Redmen, and both boys felt better this night than for many a day.

“When did you get back, Chief?” asked John, as the dignified old man seated himself.

In answer Captain Pipe said that only that day had he and his warriors returned. About

the same time there had arrived at the Delaware town a part of the band of Chippewas which had made the attack on the cabin, learning the particulars of which, he (Captain Pipe) had at once ordered that there be no further attack, and had set about immediately to settle the trouble peaceably.

As was the custom among the Indians, Captain Pipe thought that those who had killed one of the Chippewas should make reparation to the family of him who was slain. It was for this reason that he suggested that the Quaker's mare be given to the squaw widow of Gahonglas. The other horse, he said, would be returned to its owners.

"Was it a white man whom the red brothers call Spotted Face who brought the Chippewas to fight us?" Ree asked. "Or were the Chippewas a wandering band, who did not know that my friends and I dwell at peace with the Indians, and so took up the hatchet against us?"

"Killdeer says he was shot and wounded by the young Long-knife and made a prisoner,"

the chief answered quietly. "He got away at last and drifted in a canoe to the great lake. He told his story to the Chippewas gathered there after hard fighting with the white man's army."

Concluding his brief statement in the "rest you know" manner, Captain Pipe accepted the invitation John gave presently to sit up to the table and eat.

So it was Killdeer who had led the attack upon the cabin, Ree reflected; and then he told Captain Pipe very earnestly the story of their experiences with that strange, lone Indian—how he had shot at the fellow in self-defense, then finding him only wounded, had taken him to the cabin to care for him and to learn why he made such persistent, skulking warfare upon the white people and to persuade him to be at peace with them.

"The war of Killdeer is his own war. Listen to all I say. On his arm are many painted circles; at his belt are many scalps. More marks of black—more scalps—heap more—no differ-

ence—still Killdeer shall make war on the Pale-faces always," Captain Pipe answered almost defiantly.

Forgetting the dignity of the chieftain and the likelihood of giving offense, John Jerome was so resentful of the Delaware's manner that, in a tone more defiant still than the Indian had used, he said:

"Why? Why should Killdeer go prowling about shooting men down from behind? Why should he carry on his sneaking warfare against those who have not harmed him and who wish to live at peace?"

Captain Pipe gave the bold boy a quiet, fatherly, very sober look of reproof for having spoken so hastily, and then, looking from one to the other of the two friends, spoke slowly and distinctly:

"Chief Hopocon has told Killdeer that he shall not harm the young white brothers—the friends of the Delawares. The Gentle Maiden has told her father of the kindness of the young white braves when Hopocon and his warriors

were gone from their home fires and there was no meat—no beans—no corn. And Killdeer harkened to the words of Chief Hopocon that the young Palefaces be not harmed. But also has Killdeer heard the words of Hopocon that he shall bury the hatchet never with the Long-knives, excepting only the young white brothers and those who are in their cabin. For he shall kill and scalp always, and still must he be taken at last to the Great Spirit land before he has ended his war. If he lived long as the great oak trees, he still could not right the wrong he has suffered. Only with many scalps can he go to his father who is in the spirit land.

“For Killdeer is the son of a brave warrior called Great Thunder, by the Palefaces. Hear of his wrongs and listen. The Christian whites taught Great Thunder to pray. And Great Thunder laid down his hatchet, threw away his scalping-knife. Great Thunder was a Moravian. My white brothers know how he died. They know how he and many, many more were killed—chopped to pieces— and all the while

they prayed, as the missionaries had taught them—making no more fight than a wounded fawn when hungry wolves leap onto it. And my white brothers know that of all the Moravians deceived by the forked tongues of the Paleface cowards, only two escaped the hatchet and the scalping-knife of the lying Long-knives.

“Two boys—one was Killdeer— saved their lives. Through a hole in the floor of the house where the praying Indians were put, Killdeer got into a cellar by night and from there escaped into the woods. In the darkness of the forest he lay through all the night. He heard the death-songs of his kindred and friends shut up like bear cubs in the houses of logs. When came the light of day he went near. Still he heard the death-song sung; still he heard the supplications of the praying Indians, the Moravians, rising to the Great Spirit of the Pale-faces.

“Louder than any other was the voice of Great Thunder. Different from any other’s were the words of Great Thunder, crying out

to the Great Spirit of the Palefaces whom he had served. And he spoke words which smote hard upon the ears of Killdeer, his son, hiding in the forest. For in his voice were the words that he had no fear of death and that he believed in the Great Spirit; but he prayed that his son, who had escaped, might live to repay the treachery of the Long-knives. In his voice was the prayer that all his life long would Killdeer make war upon the Palefaces and spare none—make war—war—war! Avenge the slaughter of the innocent Moravians! Take many lives for each Moravian life till he could but walk under the load of Paleface scalps he carried.

“And further Great Thunder spoke, praying that to Killdeer, who had escaped, would the Great Spirit show the way to live long that greater might be the price he should reap from the Paleface cowards to pay for the killing of the Moravians—killed even as the fox kills the turkeys just out of the shells of the eggs.

“So did Killdeer, on his knees in the brush

which hid him, hear the words of Great Thunder, his father; but he knew not to cry in answer that he heard. For Killdeer had been taught to pray and to read the signs in books of the white missionaries, and to plant corn and beans, as a woman. He had not been taught the ways of war, nor how to shoot. He had not been taught to defy his enemies, though the torture fire leaped hot about him. And he feared to answer to his father's words, knowing that the Paleface cowards were all about.

"Yet did the Indian boy, the son of Great Thunder, wait and listen, and now harken to my words. He heard the noise of the killing begin. He went nearer and nearer and came to a spot from which he could see the Paleface dogs strike the defenceless Moravians down. With hatchets and clubs and spears were the men and the women and even the papooses upon their mothers' backs struck down and killed, till the ground was slippery as ice with blood.

"In one great cabin were the men, in another the women and children. All were dealt the

blows of death. Like caged birds among which starved wolves have been let loose, did the unhappy Moravians fall—one upon another, their blood flowing like water from a hillside when the rain pours down. And ever as the butchering went on there arose the gentle songs the missionaries had taught the praying Indians to sing—ever the curses of the Paleface dogs, ever their laughs and shouts, together with the groans of the dying and the cries of the young ones till hatchets silenced them.”

Captain Pipe paused and his stern face and piercing eyes took on a look of sorrow. He looked at the two boys and he looked at the Quaker. Each one sat silent, deeply moved by his recital of the awful massacre of the ninety-six Christian Indians by white soldiers at Gnadenhutten, March 8, 1782. For a full minute not a word was spoken, and the crackling, blazing hickory wood in the fireplace made the only sound. Then, in a milder tone, Captain Pipe spoke further:

“So did Killdeer see Great Thunder, his

father, killed. For from the place where Killdeer was hiding he looked into the door of the house where the Moravian men were. A woman had prayed the Paleface cowards in the name of the Great Spirit, which she called God, to show mercy. The answer was foul words. Yet did Great Thunder also lift his voice and he asked that his life be taken, but that the young children, who could do no harm, be spared. Killdeer heard the answer given him. It was, 'Death to every blasted red dog of you!'

"Even as the words were spoken a Paleface devil with a hammer crushed the skull of Great Thunder in the way the white men kill their cattle. And Killdeer saw him and remembered—saw his hair, which was black and curly—his nose, which was large and red with much fire-water—his eyes, which were little and black, and the marks of the small-pox which were on the face of the dog.

"'I think I've done pretty well and my blasted arm's played out; go on in the same way.' These were the words the Paleface devil

spoke. Then to another he gave the hammer. Killdeer saw and heard. But he was only a boy; he had not been taught the ways of war else would he have watched and waited further. He ran far and fast. In a Moravian town, also upon the river near, were yet other praying Indians. To them Killdeer hastened. He found them fleeing. For the news had come to them that these Long-knives, while pretending to be their friends, sought their lives and scalps. So Killdeer told them of the butchering of their brethren, and went with them.

“And when they had burned the houses in which were the dead bodies of the praying Indians, the Long-knives also traveled quickly to the other Moravian town. They found no one. For the Indians had learned of their coming; else they, also, would have been deceived and murdered. So were the Moravians gone, hurrying to the plains of Sandusky, and so were their lives saved.

“Hear yet these other words. The young Paleface friends and the Quaker know that Hop-

ocon speaks truly. No lie is upon his lips to make excuses for Killdeer. For Hopocon took the Moravian boy to his home and showed him the ways of war; taught him to forget not the words of Great Thunder, his father. It is known to all the Delawares that this is true. Yet have our people told nothing of Killdeer. His war is his own war. Hopocon's hand and others fell hard upon the Paleface dogs at a later day when the white chief Crawford sang his death-song; and he cannot be sorry for any who fall in the silent war of the son of Great Thunder.

“So Killdeer shall prick more black bands upon his arm; at his belt more scalps shall be hung. The words of Great Thunder still call out to him. Yet has Killdeer harkened to the words of Hopocon, his teacher. The young Paleface friends, and the Quaker, who is also the friend of the Delawares, shall not be harmed.”

Silence again followed as Captain Pipe ceased speaking. It was broken at last by the Quaker.

“Chief Hopocon, or Pipe, as thou art sometimes called, thy friend Killdeer hast already taken my scalp—see?”—and the old gentleman bent down his head.—“Now wouldst thou also deprive me of my mare? Verily, though I am a man of peace, I cannot blame the young Moravian that he seeks revenge for the cruel murder of his sire and friends; and though sorely grieved to know that my head has known the scalping-knife, I can forgive him, yea, cheerfully. But my mare, Captain Pipe—I cannot part with my mare, Phœbe.”

CHAPTER XXII.

DREAMS OF DEATH.

Return Kingdom and John Jerome had exchanged very significant looks as Captain Pipe described the white man who struck the blow which killed Great Thunder, the father of Killdeer.

Was Duff that man? The description exactly fitted him. Did Killdeer now remember him, if so?

These were the questions in the minds of the boys, but neither wished to speak in the presence of the Delaware chief. So, avoiding that subject, though he could not help thinking of it, Ree said:

“I do think, Captain Pipe, that our Quaker

friend should have back his mare. Already he has suffered the loss of a pair of saddle bags which he greatly valued. They were stolen from him by some one who entered our house during the scrimmage of this morning. Because Captain Pipe is our friend and because of our wish for peace, we will pay in goods from our store for the death of Gahonglas, but it must be remembered that our barn was burned and the Chippewas should make good that loss."

Captain Pipe was reluctant to agree to the terms Kingdom proposed, but he did at last do so. He completely ignored, however, a request made by Mr. Hatch, who, as usual, had suddenly changed his mind, and now asked that Killdeer be compelled to return to him his scalp lock.

All night the greatest of the Delawares (save only Buckongahelas, who was at the head of a village farther to the south) remained in the cabin of the young traders. They wished him to sleep in their bed, but he declined and lay down on a bearskin before the fireplace. He departed early in the morning, riding his hand-

some sorrel and carrying a variety of presents the boys gave him.

John Jerome had not refrained from asking Captain Pipe how he had come into possession of his fine horse. He succeeded in finding out that, as he and Ree had from the first suspected, the animal had belonged to an officer of General St. Clair's army which the Indians had put to rout several weeks earlier. However, that was not their affair, and as during the day they were again placed in possession of their own horse, and the Quaker his, two young braves from the Delaware town returning them, they were not disposed to quarrel.

Except for the mysterious disappearance of Theodore Hatch's saddle-bags, all knowledge of which was denied by the Indians, the troubles of the young pioneers now seemed to be over. It was a source of deep satisfaction to the boys to feel that they no longer had need to be constantly on their guard against the prowling lone Indian, Killdeer, and they began to look forward to a pleasant and prosperous spring and

summer. Soon it would be time for sugar making, and that must be followed by the planting of crops. There was much work to be done.

The Indians came frequently now, also, to trade, and manifested no spirit but friendliness. Killdeer was never among these visitors, though the boys understood that he was staying at the Delaware town, nursing his wounds; but the young friends were glad he did not come. For, while they realized that he had suffered a great wrong, and, putting themselves in his place, knew how they would feel had they seen their relatives and friends butchered like sheep, they could not bring themselves to have any feeling but one of dread and dislike of the fellow. It seemed so horrible that he should be giving his whole life to a secret, sneaking warfare against innocent travelers and other white people.

Often, too, the boys talked of Duff and the likelihood that Killdeer recognized in him the brutal slayer of his father; and, much as they disliked the unscrupulous white man, they hoped he had taken their advice and returned East.

He would most certainly be killed, otherwise, for now the Indians were about the woods every day, and his hiding place would surely be discovered.

A week passed. The soft, mild weather, which had followed the January thaw, disappeared, and storms of sleet and rain came in its place. In the early evening of an unusually stormy day, the two boys and Theodore Hatch, having just completed the building of a new barn, were celebrating the occasion with an extraordinarily good turkey-stew supper, when there came a gentle knock at the door.

"Come in, the latch string's out," called John, but Ree arose and pulled the door wide open.

Wet, cold, his hair filled with sleet, his clothes half frozen, his pale haggard face showing that he had suffered both from hunger and sickness, there staggered into the room an altogether wretched-appearing man. It was Duff.

"Cæsar's ghost!" exclaimed John Jerome.
"What—"

A quick glance from Ree, and John did not utter the none too hospitable words he was about to speak.

“Why, you are nearly frozen, man! Let me have your cap. Here, sit down by the fire. It’s a bad storm to-night.”

In spite of their enmity, and though he knew Duff to be a genuine villain, Ree’s quick intuition seemed to tell him that sickness and suffering had driven the wretch to ask mercy and kindness of those whom he had injured and on whom he had not the least claim of friendship; and his humane spirit prompted him to grant these before they were asked in words. Perhaps he was too kind, in this instance, at least. Such natures as his are likely to be imposed upon, but they rarely remember it, and prefer to be kind to all rather than turn hard-heartedly against any person, lest an injustice be done.

“Blasted stormy,” said Duff, replying to Kingdom’s remark. And then his eye fell upon Theodore Hatch, plainly much embarrassed by the visitor’s presence.

Calmly, but with an ugly glitter about his eyes, Duff looked squarely at the Quaker, the latter returning his stare, but shrinking back as though decidedly uncomfortable.

"Good evenin'," said Duff, at the end of a half minute of this pantomimic performance.

"Thou art cold and wet," answered the Quaker, in an unsteady voice, stating a fact which was so strongly self-evident that John, who had been closely observing the two, smiled in amusement.

Ree's back was turned. He was looking into the sadly reduced contents of the box in which medicines were kept; but he was aware of all that was taking place and wondered, with John, when and where these two very different men might have met before, that each seemed to find the other's company so unpleasant. But he, and John also, attributed their mutual discomfort to the circumstances relating to the hidden fortune letter, and nothing more.

Soon Ree had prepared a hot drink which Duff swallowed greedily, and then he was asked

to partake of the turkey-stew, which he did with great avidity. As they ate, the unexpected guest told his hosts, as John's questions drew him out, that, since the time he last saw Ree and John—the day in the woods when an arrow had so unceremoniously lifted the feathers from his head—he had scarcely left his home in the cave. He said he had had very little powder, and therefore little to eat.

He would have started to Fort Pitt, he stated, when the snow went off, but felt unable, and feared he might die upon the way. Hoping he would become stronger and better he waited. Instead he grew worse. The knowledge that the body of Dexter, which he had buried in the snow near the cave, was now exposed to view by the rain and thaw was a thought always in his mind, too, and he could not endure it.

For this reason he had decided to visit the cabin and beg to be allowed to remain a day or two until he should be able to undertake the tramp of one hundred miles through the woods to Fort Pitt or Pittsburg.

"It is the wisest thing you can do," said Ree seriously.

"But look a-here, Mr. Duff," said John Jerome, in admonitory tones, "you want to keep that temper of yours under control, and you want to stay inside and keep out of sight if any Indians come around. Because Killdeer is on your trail as sure as shooting, and we don't want another row with him or anybody else. Killdeer thinks you are the man who killed his father, Great Thunder, at the massacre of the Moravians, several years ago."

John could scarcely have told what prompted him to make this remark, except that he thoroughly disliked the fellow and wished to give him to understand that the quicker he should be gone the better; but both he and Ree closely observed the effects the words had.

At first Duff's haggard face grew intensely angry, but the next moment a convulsive shudder as of fear shook his wasted body. Another and another fit of trembling followed, but he spoke no word.

"We had another brush with the Indians the other morning," said Ree in a friendlier tone.

"And we were thinking at the time that you were mixed up with them," put in John quickly. "At any rate, Mr. Hatch's saddle bags disappeared during the fight."

"Did the Indians attack you?"

The question, as Duff asked it, was sufficient to show that he had known nothing of the fray. But it was an effort for him to suppress the anger John's remark caused. Yet he added, addressing himself only to Ree:

"That is one crime, at least, which I didn't commit; I know nothing of the saddle bags and care less. I suppose you searched for them."

Theodore Hatch had not returned to the table after Duff's arrival, and was now lying on his bunk. He seemed to pay no attention to the conversation. This the two boys considered strange because of the great care with which he had always guarded the property spoken of, but the subject was dropped, and Ree briefly told Duff of the attack upon the stable and cabin.

A little later all retired for the night, the boys giving their bunk to the none too welcome visitor, because Ree pitied him, and John would do nothing which he knew to be contrary to his chum's wishes, even though it meant to sleep on the floor while a man he detested and despised occupied his bed.

Neither of the boys slept well. Each was busy with his thoughts and each felt a secret fear that the enmity between Duff and Theodore Hatch might lead to trouble. And often as they awoke from the dozes in which they spent the greater part of the night they found the Quaker awake. Sometimes he was sitting up in bed, sometimes pretending to be asleep, and once a flickering flame of fire rising above the ashes, showed him to be out of bed, peering intently toward the bunk where Duff was sleeping.

The coming of morning was a relief to the young friends after these unusual actions on the part of the Quaker. The latter did not, however, rise when the boys did, but seeing that they

were up, turned over in his bunk and slept soundly.

Duff awoke as the preparations for breakfast were going forward, and though he said he felt much better, he made no move to get up. Presently when John had gone to the stable to feed the horses, he rose up in bed and seeing that Mr. Hatch was sleeping, motioned to Ree to approach.

“Bend down low,” he said. “I ain’t got much to say, but it’s important. You’ve been kinder to me than I deserve. There’s not much coming to me from you, I know; but I want to ask you to let me stay here just a day or two till I pick up a bit, and then I’ll light out for Pittsburg. That Killdeer is going to kill me. Three times I dreamed it before I came here and last night I dreamed it again.”

“It is true that it isn’t safe for you to stay here, but we will keep you until you are able to travel,” Ree answered quietly.

“Much obliged—very—but that’s not all I

want to say," Duff continued. "Is that Quaker still sleeping?"

Kingdom nodded as he bent lower.

"Because," Duff went on in a whisper, "I don't want him to know what I am going to say till I'm gone, anyhow; it would only make trouble. But that treasure buried near Philadelphia is mine and he has no right to it. Oh, I know you don't believe me—I don't expect you to, because the half of that letter you have seen— But never mind that. It's a long story and it would do no good to tell it. All I want to say is, that if anything happens to me I want you to have my share of that treasure—which is all of it. And you needn't be afraid anybody will ever come to claim it."

"Now, why don't you and Mr. Hatch get together right here and settle this matter, Duff?" Ree asked, almost impatiently. "You have one half of the letter telling where the treasure is—he has the other. You claim he has no right to the fortune and he claims you have no right to

any part of that letter or the money either. It has been a bad business—”

“Blast his crooked tongue! He shall never have one shilling of that money! The blasted old—”

Duff’s temper had escaped control again, and in a hoarse whisper he was heaping imprecations upon Theodore Hatch when Ree stopped him.

“Not one word more! You will have to hold your temper while you stay here, Mr. Duff.”

“I will turn over and get some more sleep,” the fellow answered, half growling, half submissively, and as he closed his eyes Ree thought he had never seen a more unhappy, disagreeable and altogether wretched and despicable face. He was sorry Fate had sent the creature begging mercy, and though his sense of humanity would not allow him to turn the fellow out, he hoped he would soon be gone.

Presently all was ready for breakfast except the broiling of the venison upon the hot coals soon to be raked to the front of the fire; and as

John had not come in, Ree walked out to call him. His doing so, leaving Duff and Theodore Hatch together, though both were apparently asleep, was the beginning of three tragic occurrences never to be forgotten, and following so fast one upon another that they left the boy pioneers horrified and heart-sick, their cheerful spirits for the time being completely crushed.

Though there had been other crimes and bloody conflicts deeply impressing them, none had ever come so closely home to the lads as those which were to follow the mere chance by which the Quaker and the robber were left alone together for only a few minutes.

In after days Ree blamed himself for leaving the cabin as he did; but he really knew, and John knew, that no blame could attach to him. The end, circumstances afterward proved, must have been substantially the same, though he had been more careful.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MURDER OF THEODORE HATCH.

As Ree stepped out of the cabin door, which was left open, except in severe weather, to admit the light, he noticed John standing near the river some distance from the cabin, and called to him. In response John motioned to Ree to join him and wondering what his friend had discovered, Kingdom set off at a gentle run to see what was wanted.

“I declare, I believe there are beaver along here,” said John as Ree came up. “See, aren’t those beaver tracks in the sand there? Maybe they are establishing a colony not far away. There’s a fine place for a dam near where the two rivers come together above here.”

That there were beavers elsewhere along the river the boys well knew, but none were near, and the likelihood that the animals might settle in the vicinity and build a dam and houses offered a genuinely interesting prospect.

"We better not go far away just now," Ree replied, "but some time we will take a look all along the water and see if there are beavers near here. Those tracks have been washed away so by the ripples and waves that it's hard to tell whether a beaver made them, and the ground is so frozen that none can be seen except those just at the water's edge."

"I want to look just a little farther for more," said John, and allowing him to have his way, Ree walked with him up the stream. They passed beyond the clearing and then, as bushes prevented a near approach to the water, went on to a point at which they could climb down the bank to the river's margin again.

Finding nothing the boys searched only a little while, then started to return to the cabin.

"I'll be the first to touch the shanty," called John, and broke into a rapid run.

Ree knew very well that at foot racing he was no match for his lighter, more slender companion, but he also ran forward, making no effort, however, to overtake his friend. Seeing this, John slackened his speed when half way up the hill, and together the boys reached the cabin door, panting and laughing.

John was the first to enter. A shriek of horror flew from his throat and he sank upon a stool.

"My stars!" These were Kingdom's words, and he stood for an instant dazed.

On the floor, partially dressed, as he always slept, lay Theodore Hatch, his face covered with blood, a gaping wound just above his forehead. The pallor of death was upon him and his eyes were shut. The bed Duff had occupied was empty. He was gone.

There were signs of a struggle, but it could not have been a violent one. A single stool was

upset and the clothing of the Quaker's bunk was somewhat disarranged.

"It is all my fault," Ree groaned, kneeling at the Quaker's side.

Tearing open the old gentleman's shirt he found that the heart was still feebly beating. John had already brought water and Ree washed away the blood still warm upon the brow of the dying man. Together then the lads lifted the body and placed it on the bed, and quickly, anxiously, sought to revive their stricken friend; but the flickering flame of the Quaker's life was fast going out. Their efforts were almost in vain.

At last, however, Mr. Hatch opened his eyes and there was a feeble light of consciousness in them.

"Killdeer—tell—Pipe it was—Killdeer," he managed to say, very low and in a gasping way. "I—am dying."

John turned away that Ree might not see his tears, but the latter was bending over the Quaker holding a stimulating liquor to his lips.

He feared the man would die falsely believing the lone Indian had killed him.

"No, it was Duff, wasn't it, Mr. Hatch? Do you hear me?" the boy tenderly asked. "It could not have been Killdeer. We were away from the cabin only a few minutes."

A struggle of some kind was going on in the old man's mind, and, though his eyes were closed, his brow moved and his hands clutched and unclutched themselves convulsively, indicating his mental distress.

"It was—Killdeer," he answered after a little. "But don't—tell Captain Pipe. I—forgive—him as—I—hope—to—be—forgiven. I have—sinned—grievously. Is Phœbe—safe?"

"She is in the stable, Mr. Hatch. You must lie still and not talk any more now."

There were tears in both Ree's eyes and voice.

"Nay, I—am—dying. Let me—see—Phœbe."

John hastened to the stable and in a minute had led the pretty, intelligent mare into the cabin to the dying master's bedside.

Poor Phœbe! Well as any one present she

knew, or seemed to know, what it all meant, and placed her nose affectionately in the Quaker's hand.

"Sweet Phœbe," the master whispered, and closed his eyes. "My—truest—friend. Take good—care—of her—Ree. I give her—to thee—and John—and—all I have. But my saddle bags—I—I threw—them away—in the—river. I—have—sinned—grievously."

With his face buried in Phœbe's mane, John was softly crying, and the tears ran fast down Ree's cheek as he sat on the bunk at the Quaker's side, leaning down to catch any word which he might utter. He knew the end was very near, and could not speak.

Again the eyes of the wounded man opened and looked into those of his beloved horse whose almost human, sorrowful gaze had not once left the master's face.

"Sweet—Phœbe."

A little sigh came from the Quaker's lips, his eyelids dropped drowsily, and like the closing of a day of both storm and sunshine, when the

troubled air grows calm as the sun goes down, the spirit flew away to Him whom it had always devoutly wished to serve, though oftentimes led astray.

For a little while the hushed, solemn scene remained unbroken. Ree was the first to speak.

"Poor Phœbe," he said, and stroked the animal's foretop. It was as if she knew that a new and not unkind master was speaking to her now, for the mare raised her head close to the boy's face.

"You must go back to the barn, Phœbe," Ree said in a choking voice, and leading the intelligent creature only by putting his hand upon her neck, John took the mare away.

It was a painful task to Ree to place the hands of the dead upon the breast from which the breath of life had gone, and put the body in an attitude of composure, but he did so, and covered it with a blanket, then went to the stable. He found John leaning against the door, still softly sobbing, and took both his hands in his.

"I never knew what death was like, before,"

he said, thinking of the faraway little churchyard where, under the elms, as a child, he had seen his mother buried. "But we must be brave, John. This is a terrible thing and if it is Duff who has done this murder, as it almost certainly is, we must follow him. We must catch him and take him to Fort Pitt for trial."

"Why did Mr. Hatch think it was Killdeer who struck him, Ree?"

"I cannot tell. It is the strangest thing! But of this we may be sure, if we find that the portion of that letter which Mr. Hatch had is gone, it was Duff who committed the murder. And if we are to catch him, John, we've got to be men—and lose no time no matter how we feel."

The silver snuff box in which Theodore Hatch had for a long time carried the half of the fortune letter, the box in which his half had been found among the bones of Ichabod Nesbit, was gone. The boys well knew the pocket in which the Quaker had carried it. Not only was the box not in that or any other pocket, but the most thorough search failed to reveal it.

“Broil some meat, John, and I will look for Duff’s trail. We will have something to eat, then start right out. We can travel faster than Duff. It’s a wonder he didn’t take one of the horses!”

While Jerome busied himself as suggested, Kingdom began a minute examination of the frozen ground about the cabin. There was no snow and footsteps made little if any impression on the hard earth. It was really remarkable that, in his weakened condition, Duff could have disappeared so completely within the short time his opportunity allowed him.

“He would hardly try to cross the river, at any rate,” Ree told himself, going to the edge of the bluff and looking down the steep descent back of the cabin to the water. And then his eye fell upon something which immediately interested him very much.

Swinging on a branch of a stubby bush which clung for life to the almost perpendicular side of the slope leading down to the river’s edge, were the Quaker’s saddle bags. Why had he

thrown them away after having guarded them so closely for so long? And why had he concealed the fact, pretending that they had been stolen by some one who entered the cabin the morning of the fight?

It was more than curiosity which prompted Ree to make an effort to recover the bags. It might be that they, after all, contained the fortune letter and it was readily to be believed that except to secure the letter, Duff would have had no motive for killing the Quaker sufficiently strong to make him take the risk.

If it were, indeed, Killdeer, who had struck the fatal blow, was it not extremely likely that Duff had been frightened, and had fled as he saw the lone Indian steal into the cabin?

Calling John to help him, Ree procured a long pole on the end of which he fastened a running noose which he made with a strip of buckskin. Holding tightly to his chum's hand, John crept far as he could down the steep, high bank, and with the pole in his right hand began his task of fishing.

The saddle bags were on an under branch of the bush and partly concealed from view, but by a fortunate swing of the pole Jerome landed the noose safely over one of them at last, and drew both up. In another minute Ree had drawn him to the top of the sharp ascent, and they hurried into the cabin.

"I feel like a pirate, going through a man's property with him lying dead in the same room," Kingdom sorrowfully declared, but he undid the fastenings of the small buckskin bags, and poured their contents upon the table.

"The snuff box is not there," said John, looking curiously at the tiny display of stockings, white kerchiefs and other clothing brought into view, together with a package of letters and a well-worn leather pouch of bulky proportions.

"I don't see anything here which should have made Mr. Hatch so afraid some one would rob him," he added. "What's in the pouch?"

Ree opened the leathern sack and turned its contents, also, upon the table.

"Only money," he said, as a number of gold pieces rolled out.

"Well, Mr. Hatch did not place so high a value on that, or he would not have thrown it away."

"It is English money, most of it," said Ree, examining different pieces, "about one hundred dollars of our money, I should guess without counting it. It must have been the letters that Mr. Hatch thought so much of. I don't know whether we have a right to look at them or not, but I think we have."

"Letters! One letter, anyway, seems to be at the bottom of all this trouble!" John exclaimed. "And there can be no harm in our looking through them."

Unwinding the long tape with which the package was bound, Ree opened to read the uppermost of the bundle of manuscripts.

"Here's something about Ichabod Nesbit the first thing," he announced in his quiet way, though eagerly interested, and John put his arm about him and looked over his shoulder.

Even before he could speak, however, a frantic yell of fright and cries for help came ringing in their ears and both boys ran quickly to the door.

Running at full sped across the clearing and headed toward the cabin was Duff. Closely following, gaining at every step, was the Indian, Killdeer, his long, black hair streaming behind him in the wind and the one brilliant red feather he wore fluttering like a leaf in a storm.

"Help!" shrieked the pursued white man, and seizing his rifle Ree sped down the hill to give assistance.

With the savage running in a direct line behind Duff, however, he dared not fire at once, and as he hesitated, the robber must have thought he did not mean to aid him. Maybe Killdeer was of the same opinion. Certain it is, he gave Ree not the slightest heed, and every bound carried him nearer his intended victim.

The awful scene described by Capt. Pipe in telling the history of the lone Indian flashed across Ree's mental vision. He saw Duff as the

murderer of Great Thunder, the father of the boy Killdeer, who had looked on unable even to protest, save in his heart, against the bloody deed. He recalled how the same Indian boy had seen scores of others of his friends and relatives struck down mercilessly as if they had been venomous snakes. He remembered the terrible secret warfare which Killdeer, in consequence of the massacre of the innocent Moravians, had carried on against all white persons, most of them likewise innocent. He knew that Duff was a murderer and a robber. But he knew it was his duty to try to save the fellow's worthless life even if it were only for the hangman.

All in a second these thoughts pressed upon Ree's mind and he ran forward at increased speed, his rifle in readiness to fire at the first opportunity.

"Fire! Shoot!" gasped Duff, in a broken yell, a hurried glance over his shoulder showing him the hatchet in the swift Indian's hand. The voice was the most despairing the forest ever echoed.

John Jerome had dashed down the slope from the cabin only a few feet behind Ree and quickly overtook him. In his thoughts, too, was the story of the outrageous killing of Great Thunder. He had no sympathy for Killdeer, but thinking of the duplicity of Duff in murdering Theodore Hatch, after he had been taken into the cabin and kindly treated, neither had he sympathy for him.

And then there came no less quickly to his mind the manner of the death of Black Eagle—murdered by Duff in cold blood. How like the vicious slaughter of Great Thunder it had been!

An unintelligible shriek and groan—a woeful cry of appeal—came again from the flying robber. His finger on the trigger, Ree took hasty aim; at the same instant, excited beyond measure, some strange impulse moved John to cry aloud the words he had heard Captain Pipe repeat:

“ ‘I think I’ve done pretty well, and my blasted arm is played out; go on in the same way!’ ”

Duff heard and remembered, and as though he knew the words to be the sentence of death upon him, a cry of utter terror, terrible to hear, escaped his lips.

Killdeer heard the words and he, also, remembered. He knew them well, and now, not thirty yards from Duff, the short, sharp, savage cry he gave and the fearful look of triumph upon his face foreshadowed his revenge.

Ree Kingdom heard the words as he pressed the trigger, and the bullet from his rifle flew harmlessly into the air.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MORAVIAN'S REVENGE.

By what chance, by what trick of fate, Killdeer stole up to the cabin of Return Kingdom and John Jerome at the moment he did—the most unfortunate minute possible for Duff—is a problem different persons will solve in different ways. Some will say it merely happened so, and maybe they are right; not one of us can positively declare them to be wrong.

It was just as Duff had risen and stealthily stolen from the pocket of the sleeping Quaker the silver snuff box containing the fortune letter, that a swift patter of footsteps outside caused him to leap back to his bed. He thought it was Kingdom and Jerome returning; but it was Killdeer.

Long had the Indian waited his chance to steal upon Theodore Hatch when the young Pale-faces were not there to protect him. He saw the lads going up the river as he hid near the clearing's edge. Swiftly he darted across the open space and up the hillside.

The cabin door stood open. He paused but for a second to peep inside, then sprang within.

Disturbed in his sleep by Duff's touch, Theodore Hatch instinctively put his hand to his pocket to feel if the snuff box was safe, as he did a thousand times a day when wide awake. He failed to touch the object he was seeking and then suddenly awakened, he sprang from his bed.

As he did so, Killdeer hurled himself upon him. One swift blow from his deadly hatchet sent the Quaker down.

With horror-stricken eyes Duff saw the blow struck and recognized the Indian. Escape was his only thought. He dared not undertake to fight the powerful young savage. In greatest haste and fright he fled from the cabin.

Ordinarily Killdeer would not have left a victim after striking but a single blow; much less would he have left Theodore Hatch, whom he had believed he had killed before, and for whose supposed death the thirteenth black circlet had been pricked upon his arm.

He caught but a brief glimpse of Duff as that individual darted through the doorway, but it was enough. He knew his man—long had known him. And now was the time to kill or capture him.

He had hoped to see the murderer of Great Thunder writhing at the torture stake, but he would not wait for that. He would cut the Pale-face dog to pieces. Like the wind he sped from the cabin.

Duff was already half way down the hill and running as he never ran before. Fear drove illness and weakness from him. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. Once he looked back. He saw Killdeer slip and fall heavily upon his side. He increased his efforts. His only hope lay in reaching the woods far enough

ahead of the savage to throw him off the track or find a hiding place. In a few more seconds he had passed the clearing and glancing back he saw no one.

“Luck at last!” he thought. “The letter I’ve hunted so long in my pocket, that blasted Indian left behind, and only the ground from here to Philadelphia between me and a fortune. Blast my hide! I must be careful of myself!”

Slacking his speed not a bit, Duff continued his mad race far into the woods. He neither heard nor saw the lone Indian; but he believed the savage was coming on behind, and with fortune in his grasp, he would take no chances. He overestimated his strength, however, and from sheer exhaustion he tumbled at last like a log of wood to the ground, every bone and muscle aching, his head nearly bursting with pain.

How he suffered! But he crawled close beside a great fallen tree where the wind had piled the forest leaves and partially covered himself over with them. So weak had he suddenly become that now he thought he was dying. He

could not shake the feeling off—could not rid himself of the thought of how his bones would be scattered when wolves came upon his dead body.

The idea tortured him and added to his deep misery. Never had he suffered so. But he would not die! He would not die away off here in the awful wilderness alone! A bold, cruel man ordinarily, he shivered, now his strength was gone,—shook like the coward he was at heart, in an agony of fright at the thought of death being near.

Then a new idea came to the unhappy wretch. He would go back to the cabin; he would tell Kingdom and Jerome that he and Theodore Hatch had been talking over the fortune letter and agreeing on a settlement about it when Killdeer broke in upon them, and he ran. They would believe him; they would not guess that he had robbed the Quaker.

This thought gave the wretch fresh hope and partly restored his courage. He crawled out of his bed of leaves, and, making a wide detour to

one side that he might avoid Killdeer, who, he had no doubt, was following his trail, hurried with what speed and noiselessness he could toward the cabin.

Was it another trick of Fate, or was it the working out of Duff's richly deserved destiny that carried him directly toward the Indian he feared more than earthly creature?

Had he gone straight back along the way he came he might have escaped. As it was, he hastened straight into the danger he so eagerly wished to avoid.

Killdeer had long known of the presence of Duff, the murderer of Great Thunder, his father, in these forests. Often had he thought of the joy he would have in burning him at the torture fire. No pain he could inflict would be great enough to satisfy his vengeance; but he would spare no effort to make the suffering of the Paleface as great as possible.

He had known Duff as the man who struck Great Thunder down, from the time when he discovered him with Dexter and Quilling and

saw him, as he watched, cruelly end the life of Black Eagle. Then he had laid his plans.

When the three Palefaces made their camp and he was certain they would not, for some reason, depart at once, he had hurried to his Mingo friends, Beaver Hair and Long Arrow. They willingly agreed to assist him and not a day passed that they did not know just where Duff was and what he was doing.

They made his acquaintance that they might learn his plans, and rejoiced with Killdeer when they found that he would be staying in the woods a long time. Soon Captain Pipe and the other warriors would return and there would be a great feast to celebrate the burning at the stake of the man who had killed Great Thunder.

True, the three Indians might have built the torture fire themselves,—they could easily have captured Duff and Quilling and Dexter, too. But that was not as Killdeer wished it. He wanted Captain Pipe, who had taught him how to avenge the fiendish murder of his father, to witness the painful end of the murderer.

So, as opportunities offered themselves, when he was not scouring the woods for Paleface hunters, elsewhere, Killdeer secured the scalps of the murderer's companions, Quilling and Dexter; and Long Arrow and Beaver Hair continued to watch the one white man remaining, with zeal that never weakened.

Always they knew how Duff spent the days. Always they knew if he had meat or was hungry. But Duff very seldom saw them and no one save themselves and Killdeer knew the secret.

Even when they might have aided the Paleface boys toward whom they felt quite friendly and from whom they persuaded Killdeer at different times to stay away, asking him that Captain Pipe be allowed to say whether they should or should not be killed, the two Mingoës spoke no word, nor did anything which might betray the lone Indian's plan. Lest white hunters should seek the life of Killdeer, the Delawares, also, told nothing concerning him. It was as Captain

Pipe had ordered and he had instructed the Moravian to work as secretly as possible.

However, after that wintry day when Killdeer made the discovery that the Quaker whose scalp he carried was still a living man, he could not refrain from watching the cabin of the boy pioneers. He was willing to allow them to go unmolested until Captain Pipe returned, at least; but he was so chagrined when he reflected that one scalp at his belt represented nothing save that he had wounded a man, and that the thirteenth band upon his arm did not in fact signify a death in the great family of the Longknives, that he was determined to kill the Quaker as soon as he conveniently could.

This resulted in the shot fired at Ree, who was mistaken for Theodore Hatch because he was riding the Quaker's mare, on that day when Hatch had been accidentally caught in the wolf trap. And Ree Kingdom had shot and wounded Killdeer, in turn.

The hatred the lone Indian had for all white persons made Kingdom's subsequent effort to

win the friendship of the Redskin absolutely useless. He had been taught nothing but to hate venomously every person whose skin was white—taught by Captain Pipe himself, to spare not one, even as the white men had spared not one Indian at the massacre of the Moravians.

So had Killdeer escaped from the cabin of the young traders though he was severely wounded. It was easy, however, for him to launch the canoe he found so convenient to the river, and to float with the current to the camp of the Chippewas near Lake Erie.

It was easy for him to enlist the services of warriors, some of whom were still in the flush of their bloody success over Gen. St. Clair's army. He had only to tell them that there were two horses to be secured and that these young Palefaces had been trying to kill him.

The attack upon the cabin followed. What the further result would have been, excepting for the timely return of Captain Pipe and the other Delawares, is easy to guess. Kingdom and Jerome would have been obliged to flee from

their home or they might not have had a chance even to do that.

It was Captain Pipe who put his foot down and said what should and should not be done, that morning when Killdeer and several of his Chippewa allies visited the Delaware town in search of food, having left five of their party in the woods to see that the white boys did not escape from the cabin.

The Chippewas did not remain at the town of the Delawares, but soon returned to Lake Erie. Killdeer was at home among the Delawares and had scarcely left the town from the day of the attack on the young pioneers' cabin to this day of the attack he had made by himself upon poor Theodore Hatch and on the murderer of Great Thunder. He had been painfully hurt in the battle at the cabin. Ring, the dog, had leaped upon him and, although killed at last, had undoubtedly saved the life of the Quaker when the lone Indian sought to reach him as he stood in the open door.

Thus it was that Killdeer, having seen Duff

disappear into the woods, slackened his pace, planning to catch the fellow more easily by stratagem than, in his own weakened condition, he could do in an open chase. By no means did he lose sight of his intended victim, however. Even when Duff was looking back and thanking his stars that he had left the Indian behind, Killdeer was not so far away but that he could hear the white man running over the leaves and through the brush, though he himself made scarcely a sound as he kept within a certain distance behind, two hundred yards or so to the right of Duff's trail.

Unarmed, save for his tomahawk and the knife at his belt, for he had slipped away from the Delaware town without the knowledge of Captain Pipe, the lone Indian was too cautious to fight the white man whom he meant that day, after weeks of waiting, to kill, except by taking him by surprise. He was puzzled, therefore, when suddenly he discovered that he could no longer hear the noise of the Paleface running among the leaves and brush.

Intently he listened, then with utmost caution, lest he himself be taken by surprise, he searched for Duff's trail. Not finding it at once, he went back in the direction of the cabin, then turned aside and found his own trail with which he knew that the path of the man he sought ran parallel.

Hurrying forward, doubting and anxious—fearful that the murderer of Great Thunder might have escaped, he did not see or hear Duff running toward him, going back to the cabin, until the fellow was less than fifty yards distant.

Simultaneously the Paleface and the Indian—the murderer and the avenger—discovered each other.

With a furious yell Killdeer bounded to one side and with a cry of mingled terror and disappointment Duff changed his slow trot to the fastest running of which he was capable.

Startled by the belief which rushed upon him that the white man had procured arms and had turned back to meet him, Killdeer was taken as

much by surprise as was Duff, and put a tree between himself and the Paleface so swiftly that the latter did not see how he could have so instantly disappeared; but he did not stop to find out, and by the time the Indian was certain that the white man was not hunting him, but seeking to avoid and escape him, the murderer of Great Thunder was far in advance upon the road to the shelter he hoped to find with the two boys who had already done so much more for him than he deserved.

Killdeer himself was not at his best physically or he would have found it easier to overtake his man. The wounds inflicted by the dog of the pioneer boys were not yet healed, but he ran swiftly, notwithstanding.

Duff heard him drawing nearer, and did his utmost. If only he could reach the clearing, he thought, he would be safe. As he came to the hill sloping down to the open space about the cabin, he looked back. The Indian was not far behind and gaining fast. He felt his strength to be almost gone, and his breath came in such

short, painful gasps he scarcely dared spend any of it in a cry for aid, but as he entered the clearing and neither of the boys was in sight, he sent forth a despairing shriek.

What followed has been told.

Hope rose in Duff's heart as he saw both boys come running from the cabin, Kingdom having his rifle.

Killdeer would give up the race now, he was sure. Unconsciously he slackened his mad pace, and his death came a second or two sooner for his having done so.

He thought Ree would never fire. He feared that at any instant the Indian might hurl his hatchet and end it all.

Another frantic cry for succor he gave, and then another, not in words, for he could not speak—but an awful wail of pleading, hope, penitence and abject fear combined.

As though it were an echo of his cry, consigning him to the fate he merited, came the voice of John Jerome and the fateful words, ringing in an unnatural key, weird and dismal—"I think

I've done pretty well, and my blasted arm's played out; go on in the same way!"

As the awful sentence was spoken and the bullet from Kingdom's rifle flew wide, Duff must have realized that there was no hope for him. His terrible temper was fired, and his sudden, furious anger found vent in the most violent cursing, though he scarce could speak.

He abruptly wheeled about and made for Killdeer as though to tear him to pieces with his bare hands. A horrible, exultant cry of triumph met him. It was his death knell and he knew it.

Even before the hatchet, still red with the blood of Theodore Hatch, had descended upon his head, Duff had fallen to his knees. He raised both hands either in pitiful supplication or to ward off the impending blow.

Whatever his purpose, his movement was useless. Swift and sure the deadly tomahawk came down, and the triumphant cry of the son of Great Thunder rang in the murderer's ears as the weapon went crashing through his skull.

Kingdom paused to reload the moment he had

discharged his rifle. John Jerome stopped beside him. With the greatest haste Ree sought to be able to fire again before too late. He had not intended to shoot wide of the mark; but now he saw he could do nothing with the rifle save use it as a club, and again dashed forward.

He was not more than thirty feet from Duff when the latter received the death blow. Jerome was close beside him.

One hurried glance the young Indian gave the boys, then like a shaft from a bow sped to the cover of the trees and was gone.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SECRET OF THE SADDLE BAGS.

No need was there for Ree and John to ask each other whether Duff was dead or only wounded. As they stood over his emaciated body, still clothed in Indian garb, and looked upon his pale, disfigured face now wet with blood, the marks of death were all too plainly seen.

He lay on his side as he had fallen, the cry of terror and despair which last had passed his lips still stamped upon his features. It was terrible to have witnessed his doom and to see the inanimate body lying there like that of some wild beast slain in the woods; but to both the boys there came the thought that heaven had

sent this punishment to the murderer—that Fate had helped Killdeer to avenge in a most tragic manner the killing of Great Thunder, his father.

Not knowing that Killdeer had been near the cabin, the two friends were now more than ever convinced that Duff had killed Theodore Hatch. After committing the assault, they reasoned, he had fled into the woods, had met Killdeer, and then had sought to regain the shelter of the cabin. That he had gone unarmed, taking not even his own rifle, they attributed to some strange carelessness or forgetfulness on his part, in his haste to escape after securing the snuff box containing the fortune letter.

“Two bodies to bury; we will make Duff’s grave beside Quilling’s,” said John very soberly. The two tragedies of the morning had affected him so, he scarcely spoke above a whisper.

“I wish we had coffins to bury the dead in,” Kingdom answered. “It seems so inhuman to put the bodies right into the ground. It was

not so bad in the case of Quilling when there was so much snow. Let's carry this poor fellow to the house, and we will make a coffin for him and for Mr. Hatch, too. It won't take so very long."

As he almost always did, John agreed to Ree's suggestion and in a little while the blanket which covered the remains of the Quaker also covered the body of him, who, the boys believed, had caused Mr. Hatch's death.

In a pouch Duff had carried the boys found the silver snuff box and in it the half of the fateful letter which Ichabod Nesbit had had. Nothing else did they find upon the murderer's body. The other half of the fortune letter—the half which had been taken from Theodore Hatch far back at the Eagle tavern months before, and which Duff was supposed to have had in his possession—was missing.

"But it might be a good thing if we were to eat some breakfast, while we talk about it," said John with a feeble smile as the absence of the

letter was being discussed. "I'm nearly starving."

"The letter may be at the cave where Duff stayed," Ree suggested. "He may have been afraid to bring it with him, for he did not, of course, know how we would receive him. But although all this trouble has come from our having taken him in, I would do just the same another time. You can't turn away a human being who is cold and hungry and sick, no matter how bad a man he is."

As they were eating their long delayed breakfast Ree told John of that talk he had with Duff earlier in the morning, which, although it had not made a deep impression on him at the time, he now recalled vividly. It only added to the mystery of the action of Theodore Hatch in throwing away his saddle bags, and to the unexplained connection between the Quaker and Duff which, as the boys now believed, had prompted Mr. Hatch to wish to make them believe Killdeer had committed the fatal assault

upon him, when they were certain it was the almost equally villainous white man.

"At any rate, Ree, if that treasure is ever found, we would be entitled to it," John suggested reflectively, "because Mr. Hatch said that all that was his should be ours, and then Duff also told you that he wanted you to have his share of it—which is all of it, he said. And as Mr. Hatch and Duff were the only persons we know of making any claim to the fortune—"

"John," Ree interrupted, "I should not be surprised to find that that story of the buried money as told in that letter is only a scheme to hide something else. I doubt whether there is any hidden fortune such as the writing, or what we have seen of it, describes, in existence. But maybe we will find out something when we look through the papers which were in the saddle bags. I was thinking that the first thing we ought to do would be to bury Mr. Hatch and Duff, but I don't believe that would be wise. We ought to find out more about them both first, if we can. For there may be some reason for having their

graves as far apart as possible, or a reason why it would be fitting to have them near together. I was sure when Duff came to the cabin, just by the way he and Mr. Hatch acted toward each other, that they already had met somewhere before, and then when Duff talked to me as he did, I knew I was right."

"And I think we should let Captain Pipe know that Killdeer is on the war-path again. I'm afraid of that chap," John put in, changing the subject. "What a lot we have to do to-day! For I tell you, I shan't sleep in this house till—till they are buried," and the lad nodded in the direction of the bed and the two forms covered up upon it.

"We will look at these papers first," said Ree, taking them down from the rough mantel where they had been placed, and pushing the remnants of their breakfast to one side to make room upon the table.

With deep interest and curiosity John drew his stool close beside his friend's and with his

arm over Ree's shoulder leaned down to read with him all that they might find.

The piece of faded paper on which the name of Ichabod Nesbit had been noticed was the first picked up. The writing was in a man's hand and was that of a person of some education; but the contents of the document soon became so interesting that the boys noticed nothing else.

The letter bore the date April 11, 1785. It was full of references to favors which had been performed for Ichabod Nesbit by the writer and begged him to name a place of meeting and there make a fair division of "Aunt Harriet's estate."

Further the writer pointed out that "Aunt Harriet" was as much indebted to himself as to Nesbit for the property she had accumulated, and that except for himself "the old lady" would never have saved any money but would have "let it all go as fast as it came in."

Lastly the letter said: "I only hope you will get this in time. I've got to trust to chance; for I swear I shall have what's coming to me, no

matter what it costs. You know me well enough to know what that means, and to know that I mean it, when I say that if I do not hear from you within twelve months I shall *get a pig ready for market*. Remember.

“SAMUEL DUFF.”

“Duff! Do you s’pose that’s our Duff—the one here?” asked John Jerome wonderingly, as they finished reading the letter. “What does it mean?”

“Let’s look further,” Ree answered, intensely interested.

He picked up another document, the seal of which was already broken, as was true of all the others, and saying, “We will see who the writer is before we begin, that we may understand the meaning better as we go along,” turned to the bottom of the last closely written page. The signature was “Aunt Harriet.”

The letter bore the date of Philadelphia, July 30, 1783, and was addressed to “Samuel Duff, in the care of our good friend, Theodore Hatch.”

The writing was a woman's.

"My dear Samuel," the missive ran; "I have long hoped to see you in person and tell you my plans, but I cannot wait longer. More than six months ago—it was in midwinter—I learned by chance that certain things, which we supposed were secrets, had become public. It worried me a great deal. Since then I have also heard of the untimely end of one of our friends, as you know, and all the spring last past there came and went a spot on the cellar floor which was a deep brownish red as though a pig had been got ready for market there and the stains would not rub out. Truly, Samuel, I have become so nervous, what with these things and extremely disquieting reports I have heard concerning the actions of some whom we do not trust, that I am leaving America forever.

"I shall see you never again and it will be of no use for you to look for me. Not one person this side of the ocean knows where I am going, excepting only myself. Our little property I am dividing among you and Ichabod and James and myself. James' share, however, I shall put with mine, for—poor gentleman—he will never need it now. And our good friend Mr. Hatch, to whom I am intrusting this letter, will also deliver to you the half of a document giving a

complete description of the spot where I have deposited the property to be divided between you and Ichabod.

"Now do make an effort to be again on friendly terms with your half-brother, as I fear your hasty temper will yet be the death of you. I am sending to him the other half of the letter wherein I describe the place where I have hidden the chest of valuables. Thus, you and he must meet, at least, even though you do not become friends (which, for our mutual welfare, I earnestly hope you may), before either of you will be able to obtain the property I am leaving for you. Indeed, Samuel, had you only remained as friends and brothers, I should probably not be driven to leave you and him for good and all. But 'a house divided against itself cannot stand.' I only hope you will do well. And now I bid you an affectionate farewell.

"Your AUNT HARRIET."

"P. S.—I have compensated Mr. Hatch for the trouble he is taking for me. I only tell you this that you will not think it necessary to pay him for his services."

"Stranger yet!" exclaimed John Jerome. "Why, Ree, Mr. Hatch said that he was Ichabod Nesbit's half-brother, himself, and that their

'Aunt Harriet' had hidden her property for them to divide between them when she fled to England soon after the war broke out! And see! this letter is dated 1783!"

"And you remember, John," said Ree quietly, "that Mr. Hatch said he had sinned 'so grievously'; I believe he was not fair by Duff! Certainly Duff never received this letter which was addressed to him!"

Three or four other manuscripts which the boys examined threw no new light on the subject. One was a letter which was unsigned but written in the same woman's hand as that addressed to Duff, in which the writer thanked the Quaker for having been ever a true friend who asked no questions but trusted those about him, and urged him, no matter what evil reports he might hear concerning Ichabod Nesbit and Samuel Duff, or the writer herself, not to believe them.

Another letter was written by Samuel Duff and made inquiry for Ichabod Nesbit and "Aunt Harriet," Duff being at that time in

New York and much in need of money, it appeared.

“There may be something in this, that it is wrapped up and tied so carefully,” suggested John, picking up a small roll of neatly dressed buckskin and proceeding to open it.

“Why, it has writing on it!” Ree exclaimed, as his eye fell upon the smooth surface of the skin, folded inside but now revealed to his vision. “And it is addressed ‘My dear young friends,’ ” he added. “I believe it is for us!”

The writing was for the boys, as they soon learned. With deep interest they read the lines, pale and indistinct in places, dauby and black in others, written with some sort of home-made ink, manufactured principally from charcoal and powder and water, apparently. The message was as follows:

“My dear young friends:—Strange are the workings of Providence and strange thou wilt believe them to be when thou shalt have read this which I may write, but verily, have not the heart to tell thee by word of mouth. After many sins have I been strangely led

into this wilderness to find my life work, which is to teach the Delaware Indians the true life. To that end my every effort shall henceforth be directed. My home shall be with the children of the free forest, and I am leaving thee thanking thee both for many kindnesses to me.

"Now must I tell thee my wretched secret, that with a clean heart I may begin my better work. I have sinned grievously. A woman, who I falsely told you was my Aunt Harriet, left in my charge two letters—one for Ichabod Nesbit, one for Samuel Duff—half-brothers—her nephews. I had known the family for a great many years, though not intimately. She was suddenly leaving for England never to return. One letter I delivered—the one addressed to I. Nesbit. The other being not called for at once, I yielded to the temptation and the curiosity which beset me, and opened and read it.

"I thus found out that a fortune had been concealed near Philadelphia. I learned afterward, as I secretly searched for information, that as highway robbers and plunderers of the settlers and Indians, Nesbit and Duff had accumulated the property. Their aunt, Harriet Wood, was their assistant inasmuch as she kept their plunder for them. The hanging of a member of this

company, the man James Thorpe, for murder, gave Miss Wood such a fright, however, that she decided to flee to England. Adding to her fright, also, was some unusual phenomenon—a blotch of dampness upon the floor of her cellar—‘as if a pig had been got ready for market there’ as she said, which means in the cipher language she and her nephews employed for the sake of secrecy, ‘as if a man had been murdered there’—butchered as a pig is butchered for market.

“Much I thought of the hidden treasure and knowing that the gold and jewels which made it up were stolen, I reasoned that it was mine as much as anybody’s. But I could not find it. Still I hoped to succeed in my search some day, and when at last Samuel Duff came to me I falsely told him that Ichabod Nesbit had secured all his aunt’s fortune, and I did not give him the letter I had for him.

“A quarrel between the two half-brothers had occurred a long time before, and Samuel Duff, therefore, readily believed all I told him. He made violent threats to murder Ichabod Nesbit, demanding a settlement. Years passed, and learning that Ichabod had been killed by Indians, and hearing no more of Samuel Duff, I undertook to find the half of the document de-

scribing the fortune's hiding place, which had been in Nesbit's possession.

"Mr. Quilling, the landlord, told me how Nesbit always carried the letter in a snuff box and probably had had it with him when he met his death. Therefore I set out to find the body. How Quilling stole the half of the letter I had and then sent for Samuel Duff, whom he knew very well, though he did not let me know that, thou knowest, dear friends, and my story is told.

"By what temptation I was prompted to put myself in the place of Samuel Duff and so say I was Ichabod Nesbit's half-brother, when first I told thee of myself, I do not know. Throughout my life I have been fighting a devil which is within me, which ever leads me away from proper paths. But now I have conquered. I am to give my life to the teaching and uplifting of the Indians, and that gold which is buried must remain buried. It has caused only trouble. Samuel Duff must search for it alone and he will not find it; and he dare not trouble me, knowing as he does that information which is mine would be the means of hanging him.

"So, my dear young friends, farewell. I shall see

thee sometimes about the Indian town, and shall ever pray for thee both for thy kindnesses to me.

“THEODORE HATCH.”

“Mr. Hatch wrote this one day not long ago while we were both away. I saw him have a quill that day, at least,” said Kingdom triumphantly, when he and John had deciphered the last sentence, and stood looking at each other in astonishment.

“And then he changed his mind again,” said John sadly, smiling as he remembered how changeable the old gentleman was and how hard it had been for him to do what he knew to be right, though he really tried, because of the fascination the hidden treasure had for him. “And I believe he was crazy, too,” he added.

“And to think that after all the crimes they committed, all the dangers they were in, and after all their other troubles, not one of those men ever had the use of the money they wrongfully came by,” said Kingdom thoughtfully. “Quilling and Dexter, and now Duff and Mr. Hatch have all been killed on account of the

buried treasure. Honestly, John, I doubt whether we would better ever try to find it."

"But anyhow, I am glad to know what was in those saddle bags," said John, thinking aloud. "The wonder is that Mr. Hatch kept those letters! I suppose, though, that every time he made up his mind to burn them up or something, just that often he changed his mind."

CHAPTER XXVI.

KILLDEER'S LAST FIGHT.

For some time the two boys talked of the strange chain of circumstances which had brought the well-meaning, really pious, but weak-willed Quaker and the unscrupulous robber and murderer Duff, whom he had so deceived, to lie cold in death together far in the forest's depths. Their voices were hushed and solemn in the presence of the dead, and as they recalled the tragic events of the morning and Ree told of the dreams of which Duff had spoken and the fear the outlaw had expressed that Killdeer would succeed in killing him, John said:

“But surely now we have seen the last of that

lone Indian. Such a puzzle, and such a sneaking fellow!"

"We shall have no more trouble with him, I hope," Kingdom answered. "The only thing to fear is that he will make an effort to get Duff's scalp, and there is no good reason why he should have it."

To refresh themselves and brighten their thoughts both boys presently walked into the outer air. Had they been keenly alert they might have seen a human figure glide swiftly back from the edge of the clearing as they did so.

For Killdeer still thirsted for revenge. He remembered that the dog of the white boys had fiercely bitten him and lacerated his skin with sharp claws. He remembered that one of the boys had shot and wounded him. Unhappily for him he did not remember, or at least disregarded, the order Captain Pipe had given that he must not molest the young traders or their friends; and another dreadful tragedy was to be enacted within the little clearing—within this

spot of civilization far in the wilderness—this day.

It was John who suggested that word be carried to Captain Pipe informing him of the death of Mr. Hatch and Duff. Especially would he be interested in knowing that Killdeer had killed the murderer of Great Thunder, at last, and knowing that, he might persuade the lone Indian to cease the wicked war he waged. So he mounted Neb and started for the Delaware town. He would greatly have preferred to ride Phoebe but felt that to do so would be too bad when the intelligent, pretty creature was mourning the master she so dearly loved, and so contented himself with the slower horse.

It was a clear, cool day and John was truly glad to make the journey on which he started. Indeed, he pitied Ree as the latter came out with his axe and a maul and wedges, intending to split puncheons from which to make rough coffins for the burying of the dead; but he said “good-bye” quite cheerfully and soon disap-

peared over the hill toward the home of the Delawares.

Near the border of the forest the boys had left two ash logs capable of being split into rough lumber, and these Ree attacked with axe and wedges. Soon he had removed both his hat and coat, he was so warmed by the vigor of his work. And as his industriousness helped him, too, to forget for the time the awful objects covered by the blanket in the cabin, he even whistled while he mauled in the wedges, cracking the logs into long, rough slabs or boards.

The hour of noon passed quickly by and rapidly the afternoon was wearing away. With his task nearly finished Ree presently straightened up to look and listen for John's return.

He thought he heard a slight rustle of leaves in the woods behind him, but looking around and seeing nothing he told himself he must not be so nervous, and again bent over his work. Again he thought he heard a twig crackle and snap, but he did not look up this time, and in another second there whizzed through the air

with terrific force a heavy hatchet of stone. The handle struck Kingdom on the shoulder, the head of the weapon just missing the base of his skull, and went crashing upon the puncheons before him.

From surprise more than from the blow Ree nearly fell to the ground, but instantly recovered himself. One rapid glance showed him whence the hatchet had come and a strong leap carried him to the stump against which his rifle leaned; but before he could seize the weapon the hands of Killdeer were about his neck and he was borne heavily to the ground.

A look of hate, fierce and deep, was on the Indian's face as he knelt upon the boy and tried to change his hold in such a way as to clutch his victim's throat. If anything were needed to show Kingdom that nothing short of his death and scalp would satisfy this savage whom he had tried to befriend, the short, panting breath of the Indian, hot upon his cheeks, was all-sufficient.

The thought of Killdeer's many bloody deeds

rushed through the boy's mind and as he remembered his base ingratitude, anger of the kind which is dangerous and powerful grew in Ree's heart. With set teeth and in his brain that unyielding determination which he had exhibited upon some similar occasions, he rose by sheer muscular force partially to his feet, carrying the Indian with him despite the latter's struggles. He secured the freedom of one hand at last and turning partially about tried to grasp the painted madman's throat. But the quickness of the savage prevented this. His movements were like lightning.

In a trice the Indian had himself secured the hold he had been trying for—a choking grip just under Ree's chin. Like a vice his sinewy fingers tightened and the boy knew their grasp meant death.

Never had he seemed so powerless to help himself. He caught sight of the black circles upon the arm of the savage and wondered how many would be there next day. He shuddered within himself at the thought, but still put forth

his every energy. He could not break the Indian's hold, and as they rolled over and over upon the ground in the violence of their struggle, their positions changing constantly, he entirely failed to catch the savage in any way which would loosen the grip of death upon him.

Already Kingdom's eyes were forced nearly from their sockets and his face was blue-black from the choking. The end—the end of life—must come in a few seconds if this continued; he could not breathe nor see. With strength born of desperation he rose again partially to his feet lifting Killdeer above him.

Now they were on their knees. Quick as a cat Ree's hands flew for the Indian's neck. No less quickly the savage saw his intention and thrust him back. Killdeer's was the longer reach, and fight as he would, Kingdom could do nothing;—the Indian was holding him at arm's length, both hands viciously clutching him beneath the chin.

Darkness came before the white boy's eyes and he tried in vain to put down the fainting

feeling which crept fast and faster over him. He was losing consciousness and knew it. In a minute more all would be over.

Yet once again Ree sought to exert the tremendous power of his will—his determination—which had twice before been the means of saving his life. He recovered his senses enough to hear, or to think he heard, the pounding of flying hoofs upon the frozen ground—to see, or to think he saw, a great, sorrel horse thundering toward him across the clearing and Captain Pipe astride the animal, his hair and garments and feathers waving in the wind, his left hand guiding the excited stallion, his right swinging a tomahawk at arm's length above his head, his eyes like balls of fire.

Was it some vision of his almost over-powered senses as they struggled against yielding to the awful pressure upon his throat?

Killdeer gave the flying horse and rider no heed. Perhaps he did not see them—perhaps in the depth of his awful desire for blood he did

not care; and in another second an awful yell of wrath and horror split the air.

The great sorrel reared suddenly erect upon its haunches, so violently and quickly was its swift race ended, and instantaneously Captain Pipe, still swinging the war axe high in the air, was upon the ground. With crushing force and rapidity he brought the tomahawk down, and the skull of Killdeer was broken as a thin shell beneath a giant's hammer.

The chief of the Delawares, seated on the puncheons Ree had been splitting, was calmly wiping his hatchet with a tuft of dry grass when the boy whose life he had saved by a hair's breadth of time, sat up a few seconds later, and completely bewildered, looked about him.

There lay Killdeer, a great, gaping hole in his head, dead upon the ground. Here were the frozen earth and the leaves torn and scattered by the recent combat. Close by, the sorrel stallion of the chief grazed upon the withered herbage, and there was Captain Pipe himself, cool

and indifferent as though nothing had happened.

Very soon, however, Ree remembered everything and the pain at his throat assured him that he remembered rightly. Without a word he arose and held out to Captain Pipe his hand.

“Ugh!”

With no other expression the Indian acknowledged the boy's show of gratitude.

“The Great Spirit must have sent you, Captain Pipe,” said Ree very soberly. “In about another minute, or less, it would have been all over with me.”

“Killdeer heard the words of Hopocon,” the old chief answered. “Killdeer was told to go not near the cabin of our young white brothers. Little Wolf and Flying Fish had seen the Pale-face Quaker whose scalp was gone. ‘Killdeer is but a woman who scalps the wounded and runs away in fear,’ they said, and pointed their fingers at the son of Great Thunder to plague him.

“Even as a child, Killdeer was angered. In

the night he left his lodge—left the town of the Delawares. Only Hopocon knew where he had gone when the squaws and the young bucks talked of the lodge which was empty. It was to kill him whose scalp he carried, whose death was marked also upon the skin of his arm, though he still lived, that Killdeer had stolen away in the night time, leaving even his rifle that the women, seeing it, would say, 'He is not far from here.'

"So did Hopocon come to give warning to the young Palefaces who gave food to the women of the Delawares. Hopocon does not forget. Always he remembers the goodness of the white brothers. Also he remembers Killdeer whom he taught to be brave and to make war; whom he fed and protected that the killing of Great Thunder might never be forgotten. And Killdeer heard the words of Hopocon to keep far from the cabin of the friends of the Delawares; yet he heeded them not; and he lies there."

The thought came to Kingdom's mind that

Hopocon was excusing himself in this speech for the killing of Killdeer; but he learned later that the famous Delaware had not the least regret for what he had done. His sense of justice was most acute, and while those who harmed him or his must suffer for it, and their friends were in no less danger, those who befriended him or his, and their near friends, were ever certain of his protection at whatever cost.

John Jerome, who had missed finding Captain Pipe at the Indian village, returned while the chief and Ree were talking. His astonishment as he learned what had occurred was complete. But as he became calm and joined in the conversation with Ree and the chief he agreed with them that it no doubt was Killdeer, after all, who killed Theodore Hatch, and then taking up the trail of the fleeing Duff had ended his life, also, arousing the passions in his heart so greatly that he resolved to exterminate all the Palefaces in the vicinity at once.

The presence of Captain Pipe and the certainty that peace was before them, emphasized

by the chief's promise, helped the young settlers to look back upon the dreadful events of this day, now closing, with infinitely greater calmness than they otherwise could have done, but they were filled with gloom and horror still.

The chieftain ate some cold meat with them, but declining to remain longer said good-bye, leaving the boys to the unhappy task of burying the dead. A half hour later, however, he returned, and without a word placed the cold form of Killdeer across his horse's shoulders and again mounting, rode away.

Never again did Ree and John see the lone Indian nor did they learn what disposition was made of his body.

"I shall not sleep in the cabin to-night," John declared as Ree went in to prepare a warm supper. Nor did he. Maybe it was only to humor his chum that Kingdom also wrapped himself in a blanket and spent the night upon the ground near the open door.

Neither slept much, but they were more comfortable out of doors, they were sure; though

Ree would have vehemently denied that he had any fear or superstitious dread because of the two faces the blanket covered, inside the cabin.

John went to the cave where Duff had made his home, while Ree finished the task of making the rude, box-like coffins, next day, to search for the missing half of the fortune letter. He returned empty-handed.

"It stands to reason that Duff kept that letter about him somewhere," said Kingdom as they talked the matter over.

Without ado he made a careful search. Secure and dry in a buckskin band fastened about the dead robber's waist, beneath his clothing, the document was found.

John could scarcely repress an exclamation of delight.

"I've dreamed many a time about that buried treasure, Ree, and have thought more about it than you ever guessed. Something—fascination—the mystery of it—I don't know what, made me wish we could find it. And now we have the whole letter! But honestly, I don't

care half so much about it now as I did before."

Ree looked at his friend in an odd, thoughtful way for a full second.

"We have been, and are, of just about the same mind, John," he said.

"But let's put the two halves together and see how the secret does read, anyway," Jerome suggested. "I believe, though, I almost know what the half we first found says, by heart."

In another minute the halves of that letter which had caused so much bloodshed and suffering were side by side. And this is what the two boys read:

Buried near Philadelphia is a casket containing upwards of one thousand pounds sterling and hidden with it is other gold and silver, not to mention several pieces of plate, of value not to exceed two hundred pounds. As explained to both of you in separate letters to each, my dear nephews, this fortune is for you when you shall have placed the halves of this letter together, and are able to locate the treasure which I have secreted for you. It will never be claimed by me as I shall never again return to this country, nor have I in the nature of things, more than a few years to

live. Quite like I shall never see either of you again, but the gold I have placed in a cedar box or chest and the jewels and silver are with it. Now I shall tell you how to find the casket. Twelve miles from the Bunch of Grapes inn on the road directly west, is a woodland which you will know by the many charred stumps of partially burned trees, caused by a fire sweeping through the forest there some years ago and doing a great deal of damage to the farmers, as any one can tell you. But I need not mention that now. It is a lonely, isolated spot, but you will not need to go at night to dig for the buried treasure. Growing not more than a stone's throw, or perhaps a very little farther, from the road are three large elm trees close together. There are no other such thereabout. The money and valuables I have described are buried twelve yards directly east, thence twelve yards directly north of the tallest of the three trees, which is on the right hand side as you approach from the highroad. A patch of mullen has grown up all about the spot where the chest is hidden. Seek and ye shall find, only as I have said to you in my separate letters to each of you, if you do not both share in this property, as I have been at such pains to arrange for you to do, the gold and the silver and the jewels and all shall be the property of whom-

soever may find them. But I have seen to it that the chest was buried too deep for the plowshares ever to turn it out, and very likely it will never be found unless by some strange fortune, some one other than yourselves should be the ones to put together the two halves of this letter.

“She must have been a pretty shrewd woman,” was Ree’s comment as together they finished reading the strange document. “See how she describes the property, as though it were such as might be found in any well-to-do family, while the fact is that it was stolen! It is like the letters signed ‘Aunt Harriet’—one who did not know would think that they were written by some nice, motherly old lady, honest as could be.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TREASURE CHEST.

In separate graves on the hillside Ree and John buried the earthly remains of Theodore Hatch and Samuel Duff. The latter's grave was near that of the unfortunate Quilling, but the Quaker's last resting place was by itself.

As the earth fell upon the rude coffin in the shallow trench dug to receive it, never was there a more solemn funeral party. With all his faults the boys loved the kindly old gentleman whose life they had been the means of saving, though to little purpose, and Phoebe made

a third member of the little group mourning beside the grave. No one knew better than the dapple-gray that the perplexities of life and the unhappy struggle between right and wrong which had for years distressed him would trouble the gentle, kindly, erring Quaker, her master, never more.

How very quiet it seemed about the cabin after all that had occurred, when peace, serene and deep, settled upon the wilderness home of the two boys! Neither could cease to speak of it.

They had no difficulties now with any of the Indians, although the Delawares and those of other tribes who were passing, often visited them. There was not much for the lads to do as traders, however.

The battle with St. Clair and the expectation that there would soon be more fighting kept the Indians busy planning and talking of the war-path. Many of them were in war paint constantly. They did not, as a result, do a great deal of hunting and as few had made expeditions in search of game during the winter, they

had only occasional pelts to exchange for merchandise.

But as spring came the young settlers found plenty to do upon their land. Often they chopped and burned all day long at clearing land and soon, also, a rail fence was being built about a part of the clearing to enclose a garden. Then came the maple sugar making time and the fine spring days when the fishing was too fine to be neglected. To the very best the boys improved the season and were busy and happy as beavers.

One subject, notwithstanding their being so occupied with other things, was spoken of almost every day by the two friends. It was the buried treasure. They would not admit even to themselves that the knowledge of hidden gold possessed for them any such fascination as it had had for Theodore Hatch, drawing him from the paths of honesty, but there was something about the topic which made such conversations of never failing interest.

Sometimes they recalled the fact that the only

two men who made any claim to the treasure, the Quaker and Duff, had virtually made verbal wills in their favor—Duff as he talked to Ree on that last fateful morning, and Mr. Hatch on many occasions; and they properly considered the hidden casket as their own property, should they be unable to find a more rightful owner.

John Jerome was anxious to go to Philadelphia at the earliest opportunity and search for the fortune. Ree was more inclined to let that subject drop. At last they reached an agreement which suited both. It was that as soon as their spring crops were planted they would take the furs they had collected to Pittsburg to market, and then on horseback make a quick trip to Philadelphia. If they found the golden treasure for which they were to search, and their ownership thereof was not questioned, they would go thence to Connecticut to spend a little time with their old friends. If they failed to find the cedar chest of riches they would lose no time in returning West and no one would be the wiser.

It was after a visit to the Delaware town and repeated assurances of friendship from Captain Pipe and Gentle Maiden and others of the Indians that, leaving presents for these dusky friends, the young traders once more said good-bye to their forest home.

It was early in June and all nature was at its best. The wild flowers sprinkled the ground and birds were busy from dawn till sunset with their music. And there was sunshine in the hearts of the two boys for this and for other reasons. Especially when they passed the spot where Black Eagle killed Ichabod Nesbit and where he was afterward killed himself, did they remember the great reasons they had for being devoutly thankful that, though they had come through many dangers and hardships, they had suffered no permanent injury whatever; and, also, that they were the only ones of the seven persons, including Black Eagle, who had passed the frontier and crossed the track of Killdeer, the previous autumn, now remaining alive.

Leaving their cart behind, the young traders

were traveling on horseback, Ree mounted on Phœbe and John on old Neb, while each horse bore as additional burdens packs of furs and their camp outfit. The latter was no great load —only a frying pan and a blanket or two, a tinder box and a small box of salt, medicines, etc. So the boys made excellent progress and except for a short rest at noon, were on the march from dawn to sunset of the long June days. The mosquitoes, which, especially at night, were very troublesome, were the only enemies the young travelers found, and without adventure they reached Pittsburg in a little less than four days.

It was a real pleasure to the boys to shake hands with Tall Todd, Eli Hopp, the landlord and other friends about the ancient fort and village, and it was a real pleasure to sit down at some one's else table after having been doing their own cooking for so long. Then, too, it was pleasant to tell Tall Todd of adventures they had had, he was so shrinking and timid himself, and his exclamations of astonishment were so

vehement, his wonder that both lads had not been killed at least a dozen times, so great.

To those in authority at the rough frontier town Ree and John gave a brief but careful account of the deaths of Theodore Hatch, Samuel Duff and Quilling and Dexter, and told of the killing of Killdeer and Black Eagle.

Through some Indians the information that Killdeer was dead, and that he was the one who had been responsible for the killing of so many hunters and traders, had already been received at the town. Confirmation of the report, as given by the pioneers, was most welcome intelligence; for, in many years, there had been no one Indian who had caused so much trouble along the border as this son of the murdered Great Thunder.

Ree and John had no trouble in disposing of their furs, and lingering in Pittsburg only a couple of days, they headed toward Philadelphia.

At sundown on a Saturday evening about a fortnight later, the two friends reached the

"City of Brotherly Love," at that time the capital of the nation, and riding into the metropolis along one of the western roads, chanced to see a sign, "The Bunch of Grapes," hanging upon a well kept old inn or tavern.

Fortune favored the lads in bringing them to the very tavern they sought without the necessity of their attracting attention to themselves by inquiries. For they were the objects of so much notice anyway, by reason of their frontier dress and long hair that Ree was quite bored. John, on the other hand, enjoyed creating a sensation in the minds of those they met, and well he knew that he was the envy of many of the city youths who stared at him.

The boys remained at the Bunch of Grapes over Sunday, keeping a great deal to themselves and studiously refraining from letting the object of their visit to the capital be known, though in their own room they talked a great deal of the hidden treasure. They wondered at first that they had not noticed the burned woodland to which the fortune letter referred, as they

came along the way, but when they remembered, however, that nearly ten years had passed since "Aunt Harriet" buried the treasure, they knew that the place would now be considerably grown up to bushes, if it had not been entirely cleared and turned into cultivated fields.

Prepared to make a thorough search, Ree and John rode away from the inn early Monday morning. By guarded inquiries they had learned enough of the country to know approximately in what locality they would be after traveling twelve miles, and with more anxiety and suppressed excitement than they would have admitted, they galloped over the highroads, so different from the forest trails to which they had been accustomed.

It was the three elm trees which marked for the boys the spot where the gold was hidden. The moment they saw the trees they were sure that they were the ones mentioned in the letter. The surrounding country had changed greatly since the time of the writing of the description of the spot, however, and now the elm trees

stood not in a woodland, but in a field of clover. Not far away was a farm house.

Because of the presence of these evidences of civilization the boys determined to wait until night before digging up the earth, lest they should be interfered with. Before sundown, however, after remaining away from the vicinity during the day, they measured off the distances as give in "Aunt Harriet's" description—twelve yards directly east and then twelve yards north of the tallest of the three trees.

The keen interest with which, under the moonlight of a beautiful June night, Kingdom and Jerome delved into the earth in search of the treasure chest need not be described. An excitement different than they had ever known was upon them; yet knowing that they might find nothing they told each other to be prepared to be disappointed. It was wise to do that, but unnecessary.

The cedar box was found—buried at a depth of nearly two feet. Had a stake and flag marked the place where it lay, the lads could not have

struck the exact location more successfully than they did.

Still moderately well preserved, the wood held firmly together as the chest was lifted from its resting place and carried across the road to the shelter of some trees. There by a lantern's light it was opened, and there in the lantern's pale rays shone gold and silver, in money and jewelry—more wealth than either of the boys had ever seen at one time before. There was a lot of gold and silver coin, but also bars of gold and silver which undoubtedly represented jewelry and plate, melted down. A few diamonds and other precious stones completed the chest's contents.

Not a word of writing was found—not a name or initial on any article the box contained, which would indicate who the owner or owners had been. "Aunt Harriet" had been too shrewd to leave any such clue.

"I feel like a pirate—I positively do," said Ree Kingdom, looking upon the pile of white and golden metal glinting in the lantern light.

"But you are not—neither am I!" exclaimed John, reassuringly. "We have come by this fortune honestly and I think it all right for us to be glad we have found it and all right for us to use it. It would be wrong to let this gold and silver lie buried here, of no use to any one."

Without delay the boys returned to Philadelphia and in a quiet side street secured board and lodging for two weeks. They gave their time to seeing the city and to making careful inquiry for relatives of Duff or Theodore Hatch.

To guard against being lied to by impostors, they did not tell the full purport of their inquiries, but they were unable to locate a single relative of Samuel Duff or the Quaker or "Aunt Harriet." Neither could they find any person who had been robbed by Duff or Ichabod Nesbit or the man Thorpe, who had been hanged.

The only person who could have the least claim upon the hidden treasure, whom the boys could find, was Patrick Dexter—the aged father of him who had been killed after having been led into trouble by the unscrupulous Duff.

Dexter had been not unkind to John during the latter's imprisonment at the cave, and to the old gentleman, therefore, the boys gave money from the treasure chest amounting to \$300, and then, having converted all the valuables into cash, they started on horseback for Connecticut.

Arthur Bridges, Tom Fish, Capt. Bowen, Pete Ellis and all their old friends gave Kingdom and Jerome a royal welcome home. John's brothers and sisters and his parents were so exceedingly proud of him that he would have been in great danger of being completely spoiled had it not been for Kingdom's influence preventing anything of the kind. For Ree's smile of amusement whenever John "put on airs" was enough to make the lad himself again at any time. But the young gentleman was a guest of honor at his father's home, notwithstanding.

Kingdom made his home at Capt. Bowen's, for Mrs. Catesby, in whose family he had been reared, was still in town where Miss Mary Catesby was attending school. It was a happy thought on Capt. Bowen's part when he invited

all the old friends of the two boys to his home one evening and the young men were persuaded to tell the story of their adventures.

A few—Tom Fish and Arthur Bridges—had already heard the story; for, remembering that Bridges was a half-brother of Ichabod Nesbit, the boys had at once told him the story of the hidden treasure and asked him to share in the fortune. He refused, however, kindly but emphatically.

The result was that to each of those who came to the gathering in their honor, at Capt. Bowen's home, the boys gave a valuable present of some kind. They were not only glad to be able to make gifts but they wished in that way to show that they were not selfish with the fortune which had so strangely come into their possession.

In all ways they sought to use common sense in the enjoyment of the riches which had fallen to them. Their manliness and generosity and the fact that they spent no money in foolish dis-

play won them the friendship of all who heard of the hidden treasure.

While there were some, as there always are, who, being envious, criticised the boys or secretly hinted that they had not come honestly by their money, the great majority of people who knew them congratulated both, not only upon their having acquired what in those days amounted to a snug competence for both, but upon their escape from the dangers which had surrounded them.

During the several weeks which Ree and John remained in the vicinity of their old home they were much talked about, but not more so, perhaps, than was the intelligence of the mare Phoebe and that animal's deep love for both her young masters. Like a dog the affectionate, docile dapple-gray followed one or the other or both the boys from place to place whenever permitted to do so. At every mention of the name of Theodore Hatch she showed the liveliest interest in what was being said, and often the lads were persuaded to talk of the kind but erring

Quaker only that their friends might watch the light of perfect understanding of all that was said, in the mare's eyes.

And when at last the two friends returned to their forest home they would as soon have thought of leaving their rifles behind as to have gone without Phoebe.

It was in August that they started back. Their money with the exception of that which had been spent for their friends and to fit themselves out for this, their third, trip West, the lads had placed at interest. Some day they would need a part of it to pay for the land on which they had settled, which, up to this time, they owned only by reason of having bought it of the Delawares. And it was for this very purpose that a part of the treasure was in time used.

For Ree Kingdom and John Jerome had made up their minds to grow up with the new Ohio country, and they did. Fortune did not always smile on them; they suffered many hardships and each year, until permanent settle-

ments were established around them, brought its adventures. But they ever found that, even with the Indians, fair dealing was sure to win the best profits in the long run, and it also won for them good names—names that are honored by those who have come after them, and ever shall be.

THE END.

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